



Eclipse of Grace

Divine and Human Action in Hegel

NICHOLAS ADAMS

 **WILEY-BLACKWELL**

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A John Wiley & Sons, Ltd., Publication

This edition first published 2013
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Registered Office

John Wiley & Sons Ltd, The Atrium, Southern Gate, Chichester, West Sussex, PO19 8SQ, UK

Editorial Offices

350 Main Street, Malden, MA 02148-5020, USA

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data applied for.

Hardback ISBN: 9781118465882

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

Cover image: Solar eclipse © blickwinkel / Alamy

Cover design by Design Deluxe

Set in 10/12pt Sabon by Aptara Inc., New Delhi, India

To Peter Ochs

*People talk of reason as if it were an actual entity, and of the good
Lord as if he were nothing but a concept.*

J.G. Hamann

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Acknowledgments

I am grateful to the British Academy for a Small Project Grant in 2008 to pursue study of Hölderlin and Novalis in Berlin. I am grateful to Timothy Jenkins and Peter Ochs for their challenges and encouragements, to David Ford and Sarah Coakley, whose skepticism about the need to spend so much time buried in German Idealism did not prevent them sending along graduate students in search of enlightenment, to Nicholas Walker for improved translations of the *Phenomenology* and for his probing questions about my generous interpretations at certain points, to Cyril O'Regan and Ian Cooper for their insights into how temporal forms of thinking are flattened in Hegel and Hölderlin, to Nicholas Boyle for providing the hospitality that made these conversations possible, to John Webster and Bruce McCormack, who strengthened my resolve to write a book suitable for graduate students in systematic theology, to the many students who read drafts and assessed its suitability for their peers, and to Rebecca Harkin at Wiley-Blackwell who willingly agreed to commission this book, on the condition that I produce something on Hegel that was actually readable, and who has remained steadfastly encouraging throughout the process. Her service to contemporary theology through the publication of an extraordinary range of material is unmatched. I would like to thank Janet Moth for expert copy-editing and skilful negotiation with typesetters. I would also like to thank Heidi Adams for her generous support, and most particularly for help in preparing the index. Finally I am grateful to Terry Pinkard for permission to use his as yet unpublished translation of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* as the basis for the commentary in chapter 2. All errors are my own.

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Preface

Scholarship on German Idealism has been transformed in the last twenty-five years by two phenomena. The first is the production of high-quality critical editions of post-Kantian philosophical texts. The second is the “constellation research” of Dieter Henrich, Manfred Franks, and their colleagues.¹ These two developments are making possible a shift in scholarship away from the bold encompassing overviews that characterized scholarship after the First and Second World Wars.

Such overviews were at the time vital. Whole traditions of detailed scholarship had been arrested, and the cohorts of graduate students who transmitted the traditions from one generation to the next in many cases no longer existed. After the deaths of thousands of young scholars, twice over, who had been developing different facets of the intellectual traditions, it was necessary to reconstitute those traditions through lectures aimed at equipping a new generation of scholars. These lectures were extraordinarily influential, of course, because they were in some cases the sole means of transmitting an entire tradition of intellectual endeavor. This can be seen in the case of Hegel in the persistent influence of Alexandre Kojève’s lectures on the *Phenomenology of Spirit* at the École des Hautes Études from 1933 to 1939 (assembled from notes and published after the Second World War), which shaped the

¹ Dieter Henrich, *Konstellationen: Probleme und Debatten am Ursprung der idealistischen Philosophie (1789–1795)* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1991); Manfred Frank, “Unendliche Annäherung”: *Die Abfänge der philosophischen Frühromantik* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1997); Dieter Henrich, *Der Grund im Bewußtsein: Untersuchungen zu Hölderlins Denken (1794–1795)* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2004); Dieter Henrich, *Grundlegung aus dem Ich: Untersuchungen zur Vorgeschichte des Idealismus Tübingen–Jena 1790–1794* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2004); Manfred Frank, *Auswege aus dem deutschen Idealismus* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2007); Martin Mulsow and Marcelo Stamm (eds.), *Konstellationsforschung* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2005).

imaginings of more than one generation of French philosophers.² This approach amounted to packing a tradition in a suitcase so that it could be transported from place to place, and in some ways prefigured today's publishing trend towards volumes that summarize vast areas of scholarship for the beginning student. It is important to remember that Hegel was mediated very significantly through the interpretations of Feuerbach and Marx (Kojève himself was a Marxist who, in the wake of Heidegger's *Being and Time*, turned to Hegel for a more sophisticated metaphysics than was offered by Marxist materialism). It is also important to remember that the dominant intellectual strands in philosophy in the earlier parts of the twentieth century were Neo-Kantianism and various responses to Nietzsche's critiques of the Kantian traditions, neither of which had Hegel's legacy as their focus. Hegel's diminished status at that time made attempts at capturing his principal contributions, such as Kojève's lectures or Hyppolite's commentary on the *Phenomenology* that built on them, all the more significant.³

There was in the 1960s a significant flourishing of interest in Hegel, including in his religious thinking, in Germany. It culminated in Hans Küng's *Menschenwerdung Gottes* and Theunissen's *Hegels Lehre vom absoluten Geist* (together with a number of responses, including a well-known lecture by Pannenberg): these texts drew on scholarship (including English and French contributions) over a twenty-year period from a variety of significant philosophical figures, whether on the "left" (Adorno, Bloch, Habermas, Marcuse) or more traditional interpretations (Albrecht, Bruaire, Chappelle, Fackenheim, Fulda, Gadamer, Garaudy, Ritter, Rohrmoser, Splett).⁴ These works

² Alexandre Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel* (ed. R. Queneau and Allan Bloom, tr. J. Nichols, New York: Cornell University Press, 1980).

³ Jean Hyppolite, *Genesis and Structure of Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit* (tr. S. Cherniak and J. Heckman, Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1974).

⁴ Hans Küng, *Menschenwerdung Gottes: eine Einführung in Hegels theologisches Denken als Prolegomena zu einer künftigen Christologie* (Freiburg: Herder, 1970); Michael Theunissen, *Hegels Lehre vom absoluten Geist als theologisch-politischer Traktat* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1970); Theodor Adorno, *Negative Dialektik* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1966); Herbert Marcuse, *Reason and Revolution: Hegel and the Rise of Social Theory* (London: Routledge, 1954; trans. into German in 1962); Wolfgang Albrecht, *Hegels Gottesbeweis: eine Studie zur "Wissenschaft der Logik"* (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1958); Claude Bruaire, *Logique et religion chrétienne dans la philosophie de Hegel* (Paris: Seuil, 1964); Albert Chappelle, *Hegel et la religion* (3 vols., Paris: Éditions universitaires, 1964, 1967, 1971); Emil Fackenheim, *The Religious Dimension in Hegel's Thought* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1967); Hans Friedrich Fulda, *Das Problem einer Einleitung in Hegels Wissenschaft der Logik* (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1965); Hans Georg Gadamer, *Hegels Dialektik: fünf hermeneutische Studien* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1971); Roger Garaudy, *Dieu est mort: étude sur Hegel* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1962); Günter Rohrmoser, *Subjectivität und Verdinglichung: Theologie und Gesellschaft im Denken des jungen Hegel* (Gütersloh: Mohn, 1961); Joachim Ritter, *Hegel und die französische Revolution* (Cologne: Opladen, 1957); Jörg Splett, *Die Trinitätslehre G.W.F. Hegels* (Freiburg: Alber, 1965).

play little role in this study, but are cited here in order to show the flourishing of interest in Hegel, not least in his theological thought, in this period, where it can sometimes look as though Fackenheim's contribution (well known because in English) stands alone. This tradition receives a thorough review both in Cyril O'Regan's *Heterodox Hegel* and in Martin Wendte's *Gottmenschliche Einheit bei Hegel*.⁵ It is not obvious that this had much of an immediate impact on theology outside Germany, beyond an interest in Adorno's *Negative Dialectics*, which entered the English-speaking cultural imagination via the left-wing intelligentsia. Theunissen's intelligent and profound investigation of passages from the *Encyclopaedia* concerning absolute spirit has stood the test of time, however, and is one of the major works that still rightly appears in theological engagements with Hegel. It is an unusual work, in that the main central section is a long commentary on a dozen or so paragraphs from the *Encyclopaedia*; I have taken Theunissen's textually detailed approach as a model for this current study, as well as taking up his concern with Hegel's handling of false oppositions.

A number of influential texts in English in the last quarter of the twentieth century brought Hegel back into the English-language mainstream. Charles Taylor's *Hegel* (1975), Gillian Rose's *Hegel Contra Sociology* (1981), Alasdair MacIntyre's *After Virtue* (1981), Jürgen Habermas' *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* (1985, trans. 1987), and Robert Pippin's *Hegel's Idealism* (1989) brought Hegel's legacy to bear on contemporary philosophical problems in ways that have proven highly generative in the twenty-first century. It was Rose and Pippin who inspired my own forays into Hegel's *Phenomenology* during graduate work in Cambridge in the early 1990s. They completely transformed a younger generation's imagination as to what Hegel was about and why he might be important. They led, in part, to the development of a number of different transmissions of Hegel's philosophy, including rapprochements between analytic, pragmatist, and continental philosophy in work by figures such as Robert Brandom, Paul Franks, John McDowell, Paul Redding, Robert Stern, and many others. They have also shaped more aggressive attempts to rehabilitate Hegel as a major figure of contemporary influence, such as the work of Stephen Houlgate, Terry Pinkard, and Kenneth Westphal.⁶

⁵ Cyril O'Regan, *The Heterodox Hegel* (New York: SUNY, 1994); Martin Wendte, *Gottmenschliche Einheit bei Hegel: Eine logische und theologische Untersuchung* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2007). As well as offering a comprehensive theological engagement with the German bibliography (it generally ignores the English and French traditions of interpretation), Wendte focuses not on the *Phenomenology* and the *Encyclopaedia* but on the *Science of Logic* and the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*.

⁶ Charles Taylor, *Hegel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975); Gillian Rose, *Hegel Contra Sociology* (London: Athlone, 1981); Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral*

In France two magisterial contributions, one by a Cuban and the other by a Hungarian, are changing the way Hegel's religious thought is interpreted. The first is Emilio Brito's *La Christologie de Hegel: Verbum Crucis* (1983). This study, written in Spanish but published in French translation, is a painstaking interpretation of Hegel's texts relating to Christology, in the early writings, the *Phenomenology*, the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, and the *Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences*, combined with a seemingly exhaustive engagement with the secondary literature. The scale and the mastery of detail, both of Hegel's texts and of Hegel's interpreters, are intimidating. The second is Miklos Vetö's *De Kant à Schelling: Les deux voies de l'idéalisme allemande* (1998 and 2000). This major work traces the two paths that stem from Kant's philosophy, one that leads via Fichte to Hegel's conception of reason, the other that leads to the late Schelling's concern with the ground of reason. Rather than seeing these as rival interpretations of a single Kantian legacy, Vetö argues that they are better viewed as divergent paths with distinct developments. His study is noteworthy for its focus on Leibniz rather than Spinoza as the significant backdrop to the way Kant's philosophy developed, owing to Leibniz' concern with a dynamic metaphysics. This may also partly explain the unusual concern with the question of evil, which takes up a considerable part of the study.⁷

Theological engagements with Hegel in English remain rather limited in number, and more recent well-known contributions include Peter Hodgson's

Theory (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1981); Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* (tr. F. Lawrence, Cambridge: Polity, 1987); Robert Pippin, *Hegel's Idealism: The Satisfaction of Self-Consciousness* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); Robert Brandom's most relevant investigations are not yet in print, but are accessible on his website: <http://www.pitt.edu/~brandom/index.html> (last accessed 17 Aug. 2012); Paul Franks, *All or Nothing: Systematicity, Transcendental Arguments, and Skepticism in German Idealism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005); John McDowell, *Having the World in View: Essays on Kant, Hegel, and Sellars* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008); Paul Redding, *Analytic Philosophy and the Return of Hegelian Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Robert Stern, *Hegel, Kant and the Structure of the Object* (London: Routledge, 1990); Stephen Houlgate, *An Introduction to Hegel: Freedom, Truth and History* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), and *The Opening of Hegel's Logic: From Being to Infinity* (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 2006); Terry Pinkard, *Hegel's Phenomenology: The Sociality of Reason* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), and *Hegel: A Biography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Kenneth Westphal, *Hegel's Epistemological Realism* (Heidelberg: Springer: 1989) and *Hegel's Epistemology: A Philosophical Introduction to the Phenomenology of Spirit* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2003). The best introduction to Hegel, in my view, is Houlgate's *Introduction to Hegel*. Rose's *Hegel contra Sociology* is no longer fashionable, and although short is one of the most difficult texts, but it remains explosive and brilliant.

⁷ Emilio Brito, *La Christologie de Hegel: Verbum Crucis* (tr. B. Pottier, Paris: Beauchesne, 1983); Miklos Vetö, *De Kant à Schelling: Les deux voies de l'Idéalisme allemande*, vol. 2 (Grenoble: Millon, 2000).

interpretations of the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, Dale Schlitt's descriptions of Hegel's Trinitarian thought, Andrew Shanks' championing of Hegel as a model figure who insists on thinking through the shapes of Christian life (with a noticeable focus on the figure of "the unhappy consciousness" from the earlier part of the *Phenomenology*), Cyril O'Regan's thorough and charitable investigations into the whole range of Hegel's theological thinking, including Hegel's engagements with the Gnostic strands of German thought, William Desmond's battling with Hegel in the development and articulation of his own "metaxalogical" project, and Martin de Nys' introduction to Hegel's relation to theology. Karl Barth's short article on Hegel in *Protestant Theology in the Nineteenth Century*, from 1947, remains a major point of reference for many theological students in seminaries, despite its limited focus on one aspect of Hegel's *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*: it is wholly inadequate as an introduction to Hegel for theologians. John Milbank's chapter "For and Against Hegel" in *Theology and Social Theory* (itself one of the fruits of Gillian Rose's work) is not intended as an introduction to Hegel, and cannot serve as one, yet along with Barth's essay it is often the only thing on Hegel theological students read. Milbank's essay falls into a familiar trap: it treats Hegel's logical investigations as, at root, contributions to ontology. Hegel is thus criticized for his accounts of the subject, of negation, and of infinity; too much emphasis is laid on necessity and system (as if an inexorable logic drives the ontological claims), and not enough effort is made to discern the ways in which Hegel's logical contributions call false oppositions into question and offer alternative ways of thinking – where ontological claims show themselves in certain ways rather indefinite and amenable to rival modes of logical handling. I offer a radical alternative to Barth's and Milbank's ways of reading Hegel.⁸

⁸ The main English-language theological engagements with Hegel are Andrew Seth Pringle-Pattison, *The Development from Kant to Hegel, with Chapters on the Philosophy of Religion* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1882); Fackenheim, *The Religious Dimension*; Darrel Christensen (ed.) *Hegel and the Philosophy of Religion: The Wofford Symposium* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1970); Bernard Reardon *Hegel's Philosophy of Religion* (London: Macmillan, 1977); James Yerkes, *The Christology of Hegel* (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1978); Dale Schlitt, *Hegel's Trinitarian Claim: A Critical Reflection* (Leiden: Brill, 1984) and *Divine Subjectivity: Understanding Hegel's Philosophy of Religion* (London: Associated University Presses, 1990); Andrew Shanks, *Hegel's Political Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), and *Hegel and Religious Faith: Divided Brain, Atoning Spirit* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 2011); John Walker (ed.), *Thought and Faith in the Philosophy of Hegel* (London: Kluwer, 1991); John Burbidge, *Hegel on Logic and Religion: The Reasonableness of Christianity* (New York: SUNY, 1992); David Kolb (ed.), *New Perspectives on Hegel's Philosophy of Religion* (New York: SUNY, 1992); O'Regan, *Heterodox Hegel*; William Desmond, *Hegel's God: A Counterfeit Double* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003); Peter Hodgson, *Hegel and Christian Theology: A Reading of the Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); Martin De Nys *Hegel and Theology* (London: T. & T. Clark, 2009). See also

The two phenomena named at the beginning – the availability of critical editions and the development of constellation research – have altered the landscape further since then. It has become possible to undertake detailed textual interpretation, on the one hand, and to gain a sense of the extraordinarily fertile intellectual context in which Hegel's texts were produced on the other. I spent a useful sabbatical in Berlin becoming acquainted with work on the importance of Hölderlin and Novalis for an appreciation of the shape of German Idealism and its critics, especially Hölderlin's investigations into being and Novalis' explorations into the difficulty of representing the subject. The classic trio of Fichte–Schelling–Hegel as respondents to Kant is no longer a compelling way of thinking about the idealist tradition. Fichte is in fact a distorting figure in the tradition: his project warps the reception both of Kant (who is often treated as far more systematic, in a dull way, than he actually is) and of Hegel (who is often thought to be more totalizing – and frankly bizarre – in his philosophical ambitions than is warranted by the evidence of the texts). The images of Kant and Hegel are significantly distorted in many students' imaginations by the shape of Fichte's rationalism. Henrich's interest in championing of Hölderlin as a philosopher and Frank's explorations of Novalis as a critic of Fichte encourage a much broader set of investigations into questions of self-consciousness and language than a concern with just Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre*, Schelling's *System of Transcendental Idealism*, and Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* is likely to stimulate. Indeed it makes less and less sense sharply to distinguish early German Romanticism from German Idealism the more one sees the shared intellectual concerns, in Kant and Fichte, that stimulated both traditions. Frank's work has shaped the strongly anti-Hegelian project of Andrew Bowie, which is focused on questions of how philosophy can articulate more than conceptual thinking can grasp. Bowie's project is brilliant, and marks a high-water mark of writing about German philosophy in English. In some ways his rightly influential *Schelling and Modern European Philosophy* is an atheist retrieval of the medieval insight that God exceeds what human language can conceptually articulate (where God is substituted in Bowie's work by other terms such as truth or being), and for this reason is (along with his two major works *Aesthetics and Subjectivity from Kant to Nietzsche* and *Music, Philosophy and Modernity*) important work for theologians to read. It is compelling on Hegel's failure to do justice to aesthetics, but has relatively little to say

Karl Barth, "Hegel," in *Protestant Theology in the Nineteenth Century* (tr. B. Cozens, London: SCM, 1972), pp. 384–421; John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), pp. 147–176. For those seeking a good theological introduction to Hegel I recommend Burbidge and Shanks followed by O'Regan. Burbidge frames his account as a series of answers to questions posed by Lessing; Shanks offers one of the best accounts of why Hegel's account of reconciliation remains compelling; O'Regan is long and difficult but superb.

about Hegel's approach to truth.⁹ The constellation philosophy project, and parallel scholarship in the USA such as that of Frederick Beiser, have vastly enhanced our understanding of how figures such as Hamann, Herder, Lessing, and Jacobi (in the eighteenth century) and Hölderlin, Novalis, Tieck, and the Schlegels (in the nineteenth century) are vital to an understanding of the development of ideas developed in the texts and lectures by the better-known figures such as Hegel and Schelling.¹⁰ Schleiermacher is the wild card here: as his theological reputation becomes largely a concern only of aficionados and historians, his philosophical contributions are coming to be re-evaluated through the work of Manfred Frank and Andrew Bowie.

The turn to the texts, facilitated by readily available critical editions, has made possible a textually oriented interpretive approach to Hegel which stands in sharp contrast to the bold overviews of the twentieth century. Commentaries are obviously textually attentive given the genre. The newer development is detailed and textually attentive work even in thematic and argumentative studies. This can be seen supremely in the writing of Stephen Houlgate, who engages at a level of textual attentiveness unmatched by most other Hegel scholars, with the notable exception of Theunissen, and, in a more narrowly focused way, by Peter Dews, whose remarkable chapter on Hegel in his *The Idea of Evil* is a model for theologically minded readers who wish to describe, in English, Hegel's approach to theologically significant topics.¹¹

It is customary to begin any work on Hegel with a polemical attack on the inadequate accounts of Hegel that characterize encyclopaedia articles on his thought and with caveats about what is possible given the vastness of the secondary bibliography. I have chosen to begin with a statement of the field, or at least one way of viewing part of it. It can be summarized. There is a tradition of bold overviews of Hegel (Kojève, Barth, Milbank); there is a tradition of English-language philosophical engagements with Hegel (Rose, MacIntyre, Pippin, Pinkard, Houlgate, Westphal, McDowell, Brandom, Stern, Franks); there is a tradition in French scholarship of attention to detail (Brito, Vetö); there is a tradition, in English, of theological engagement with Hegel (Hodgson, Schlitt, Shanks, O'Regan, Desmond); and there is a tradition of contextual study of German philosophy including Hegel (Henrich, Frank, Beiser, Bowie).

⁹ Andrew Bowie, *Schelling and Modern European Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 1993); *Aesthetics and Subjectivity from Kant to Nietzsche* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003); *Music, Philosophy and Modernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

¹⁰ Frederick Beiser, *The Fate of Reason: German Philosophy from Kant to Fichte* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), and *German Idealism: The Struggle against Subjectivism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008).

¹¹ See especially Houlgate's *The Opening of Hegel's Logic*, above all the introduction; Theunissen, *Hegels Lehre*; Peter Dews, *The Idea of Evil* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007), pp. 81–117.

In the midst of this complex scholarly situation, I wish to identify one problem for theologically minded readers. It is that theological interest in Hegel tends to focus on Hegel's "religious" thought, even though some of his more important contributions for theology lie in his philosophical arguments (Theunissen and Wendte are notable exceptions). Philosophers, when assessing Hegel's contemporary importance, tend to focus on the *Phenomenology* and the *Science of Logic* and to ignore the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* (Houlgate and Dews are exemplary exceptions). The problem is that there is no easy division between "philosophical" and "theological" work in Hegel: it is all philosophical, and it is all concerned with God in various ways. There is no "religious dimension" in Hegel (negatively to echo Emil Fackenheim) any more than there is a religious dimension in Descartes or Kant: the work is saturated and permeated with religious concerns.

Theological interest in Hegel tends to exhibit a further curious feature: it is overwhelmingly concerned with questions of ontology. It is Hegel's approach to being, or more specifically to thinking being, that is often the focus. This concern is then allied with other questions such as what Hegel's Christology or Pneumatology or theodicy might be. This is curious because Hegel himself is quite explicit that his primary interest is in logic rather than ontology. He certainly has emphatic ontological commitments (although I would prefer to say that he develops a distinctive system of classification): how could a philosopher not? But his contributions are not principally to ontology, and are not presented as contributions to ontology. They are contributions to logic, and are heavily advertised as such. At the same time he shows almost no interest in contributing to Christology or Pneumatology or theodicy, doctrinally conceived: and it is very hard work for scholars to reconstruct what such contributions might look like, as the impressive studies by Brito and O'Regan make clear.

This study thus takes a new tack in the English-language bibliography. It advances a simple proposition: Hegel's importance for contemporary theology lies in his contributions to logic. Wendte makes a persuasive theological case for taking Hegel's *Science of Logic* and his *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* together, and I develop this insight along complementary and more emphatic lines. This proposition is defended (following the model established by Theunissen in *Hegels Lehre*, and developed by Wendte), through commentary on texts: *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, *Science of Logic*, and *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*. These texts are enormous, and I am selective. I attempt to show how Hegel's logical investigations display certain theological interests, without being contributions to doctrine. Hegel receives doctrines, above all the doctrine of the Trinity, and draws attention to certain logical features; in my reading he does not attempt to alter the doctrines themselves but rather to alter how those doctrines are received philosophically. I argue, as a secondary matter, that the shape of Hegel's

approach to Christian doctrine is broadly Johannine, although in a rather vague way that cannot be pinned down.

Besides the outstanding work of Martin Wendte, there are to my knowledge no theologically oriented studies of Hegel that are primarily concerned with his logic, and for that reason this study exhibits two easily noticed features. The first is that it is developed through detailed commentary on texts rather than through bold overview. My argument is simple and is best demonstrated by showing how Hegel's texts exhibit certain features. The second is that I engage with rather little of the English-language secondary literature. This is in part a reflection of my reading habits: the preparation for this book was largely oriented to Hegel's texts (which I read slowly), to other philosophical primary texts of the period, and to secondary texts which deal with the philosophical context in which Hegel wrote. The latter have no immediate bearing on my argument. It is also in part a reflection that for the most part I am not arguing against any interpretations in particular. The theologically oriented interpreters do not make claims whose details I wish to dispute here: I take a different approach entirely. There are plenty of claims to dispute, to be sure, but again they have no immediate bearing on my argument. It is theological interpreters' silence on matters of logic that are relevant to this study, and I aim to fill that silence. Finally, it is in part a reflection of the scale of the task: I rather exuberantly take on three big texts, each of which has a gigantic (and high-quality) secondary bibliography and I am aware that it cannot simply be ignored or dismissed. There is a lot of rubbish written about Hegel, to be sure, but a great deal is superb: Hegel has a tendency to make thinkers work harder, often with happy results. My selections are a matter of compromise and realism about what is possible within the scope of a book of this kind and length. If my broad proposals find a positive reception, there will be plenty of detailed further work to be done.

I am convinced that Hegel's importance for theology lies in his philosophical arguments, rather than in his treatment of theological or "religious" topics. This book aims to spread that conviction. It also has a secondary purpose. My experience of teaching Kant and Hegel to postgraduates is that students tend initially to respond in one of two ways to the difficulty of the texts. The first is to seek refuge in the commentators; the second is to seek refuge in bold overviews. In extreme cases some students (even rather good ones) find it more congenial to read commentators than to read the text, on the grounds that the commentators are more accessible; and some students find it more impressive, at first, to talk about 'Hegelian philosophy' but soon get bogged down in rather unfocused discussions of "sublation," "dialectic," and "negation." These tendencies are, I think, displays of fear. I have thus written a text whose secondary aim is to produce fearless (but respectful) theological readers of Hegel. I cannot claim that every reader will magically

become capable of making sense of Hegel's texts; but there have been good results with test subjects, and I am confident that few readers will emerge with a desire to read only commentators or to produce bold overviews with only tangential relation to the texts. The text of this study is laid out in a way that makes reading Hegel's texts as attractive and compelling as possible.

Introduction

This book is a study of portions of three texts by Hegel: *Phenomenology of Spirit*, *Science of Logic*, and *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*. The subtitle “Divine and Human Action in Hegel” is grander than is strictly warranted: not all of the relevant texts in Hegel’s corpus are surveyed, and of those that are, only small portions are considered in detail. This reflects a decision not to offer an overview of Hegel’s thought, but to engage with particular texts in a sustained fashion. The book is for readers who wish to understand Hegel’s significance for theology, and covers one aspect of that significance: Hegel’s development of a logic in which false oppositions (between subject and object, thinking and being, individual and community, divine and human, philosophy and theology) are overcome. It is in this context that one can best evaluate whether Hegel gives a problematic account of the relation between divine and human action, and determine whether there is in his work an eclipse of grace.

Those who teach the classic German theological texts of the twentieth century – by Barth, Tillich, Bonhoeffer, Balthasar, Rahner, Pannenberg, Moltmann – face a well-known problem. Hegel’s philosophy is an important source for understanding these texts, both as an explicit reference (the texts engage with Hegel) and as an implicit influence (the texts are shaped by his thinking in various ways). Yet there are few studies of Hegel that equip graduate students in systematic theology with what they need. Theologians tend to write about Hegel’s “religious” thinking; philosophers tend not to engage with Hegel’s theological significance, owing to a lack of interest in theology by philosophers in general. There are good introductions to German philosophy, such as Andrew Bowie’s *Introduction to German*

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Philosophy and Terry Pinkard's *German Philosophy 1760–1860*, but connections to the theological tradition are few and far between in their pages.¹ There are likewise good introductions to the German theology, such as the *Cambridge Companion* series on individual figures, but connections to the German philosophical tradition in these studies are rather half-hearted. The unhappy consequence is that students must read philosophical works by philosophers reluctant to engage with the theology and theological works by theologians whose focus is other than philosophy: it is left to the students to make the connections as best they can. This book aims to make some of those connections through a theologically informed engagement with Hegel's philosophical texts.

There has never been a better time for theologians to read Hegel and his contemporaries. There are excellent critical editions from the publishing house Felix Meiner of the major works, together with inexpensive Suhrkamp republications of older editions. There are good translations, often with carefully produced apparatus and indices. There is plentiful contemporary commentary and analysis in English, French, and German. The work is available as never before, and there is secondary material to suit all levels of reader from beginner to archive researcher.

There has never been a more perplexing time for theologians to read Hegel. There is an increasing gap between the *wirkungsgeschichtlicher* Hegel passed down from lecture hall to lecture hall, whose influence on theologians is visible in nearly every text by Barth, Bonhoeffer, Tillich, and von Balthasar, and the textual Hegel who can be studied in the latest critical editions. The Hegel who is "historically effective" is almost a different figure from the Hegel one encounters through detailed engagement with texts. Again and again one encounters bold claims about Hegel in classic works – bold claims which then shape later thinking – which do not stand up to scrutiny when one reads the actual texts. This is not surprising: those making the bold claims were repeating and developing what they learned as students more often than they were offering commentary on texts. There are thus two Hegels: the received wisdom about Hegel's ideas, which has an influence on the theologians, and the actual texts, which contain what Hegel actually said, which may have had rather less influence in the past, but which are shaping current scholarly engagement with Hegel. Encyclopaedia articles on Hegel tend to repeat the received wisdom; the latest scholarship on Hegel tends to explore the texts. Keeping track of both Hegels is strenuous labor. Worse, there seem to be as many Hegels as there are interpreters, and the old quip about the Bible being a nose of wax that can be reshaped to suit

¹ Andrew Bowie, *Introduction to German Philosophy: From Kant to Habermas* (Cambridge: Polity, 2003); Terry Pinkard, *German Philosophy 1760–1860: The Legacy of Idealism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

any reader seems to apply just as much to Hegel. Hegel's own texts seem so irremediably vague as to require translation into an alternate idiom just to get started with what his basic questions are, let alone permit disagreements on details.

The philosophers who champion Hegel today are prone to justify Hegel's relevance on the grounds that it speaks to their contemporary concerns, rather than the (much more plausible) grounds that it continues to be generative and offers a powerful critique of the poverty of much contemporary philosophy in English. Worse, those philosophers often neglect Hegel's theological interests and some even deny (astonishingly) that Hegel has a metaphysical project at all. Theologians wanting help with Hegel's perplexing remarks about God, the Trinity, Jesus Christ, Spirit, the Church, and so on find rather quickly that the philosophical commentaries in English are rather timid on (or simply uninterested in) these questions. It is small wonder that Barth's famous essay "Hegel" in *Protestant Theology in the Nineteenth Century* remains a primary source for theologians, even though it is largely based on a questionable reading of a dated edition of a single work.² Barth's essay is easy to read, magisterially confident in tone, and neatly places Hegel as a modern Pelagius. (It comes as a real shock to students who know Barth's *Church Dogmatics* to read the various versions of Hegel's *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* and to discover just how neo-Hegelian Barth actually is in many significant respects.) Hegel is more inaccessible than ever: the secondary literature is massive and refers to a bewildering number of German editions whose paginations do not agree.

This book will not solve these deep problems. It does acknowledge them, however, and is intended to provide encouragement and assistance to systematic theologians, Christian ethicists and their graduate students who know they should read Hegel but scarcely have time to devote to serious study of Kant, let alone the figures who succeed him.

This book will be focused on texts, not a figure. More specifically it will be concerned with small portions of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, the *Science of Logic*, and the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*. Happily these texts are available in recent translations, and the discussions here will be oriented to the latest paperback critical German editions in a way that makes reference to the translations straightforward.

The renaissance of interest in Hegel by American and British philosophers is for the large part bypassed here. The exceptions are Stephen Houlgate and John Burbidge. These two commentators write with deceptive simplicity and lack of pretension and it is easy for the unwary reader to assume that their arguments lack the intellectual force of more flamboyant figures like Žižek

² Karl Barth, "Hegel," in *Protestant Theology in the Nineteenth Century* (tr. B. Cozens, London: SCM, 1972).

or writers with a more authoritative style like Habermas. It is purely a matter of branding. I consider Houlgate and Burbidge to be far superior to them, when it comes to Hegel, in nearly every way, and I draw extensively on their insights. The reason for not thoroughly engaging other philosophers is that while they provide excellent commentary on Hegel's epistemology they offer almost nothing of interest on Hegel's significance for theology, for it is not in the area of epistemology that Hegel's theological significance lies. Some theologians (above all Andrew Shanks and Peter Hodgson) have promoted Hegel's significance for theology, and these (very different from each other, as they replay the nineteenth-century split between "left" and "right" Hegelians) are largely in the service of a broadly liberal theology attempting to engage contemporary culture. This is valuable and fascinating work, but it is of limited use to the systematic theologians and Christian ethicists who are the imagined readers of this study. Those theologians need an account of Hegel's *logic*, because this generates the German philosophical lexicon through which many of the imaginative theological moves in the twentieth century are cast. Hegel's theological innovations are quite secondary in significance to his production of the powerful philosophical lexicon.

Finally, and more eccentrically perhaps, this book is not much interested in Hegel's theological ideas. Hegel wrote from time to time about the Trinity, he had an identifiable Christology, and he was utterly fascinated by the Church. There are good studies of this and my argument will be misunderstood if I am taken to deny it.³ Their absence from this study certainly calls for some explanation, which I shall offer now.

This book is for theologians who want to know what it is about Hegel's philosophy that was important for the great German-speaking theologians of the mid twentieth century, and what remains generative about that

³ See Emilio Brito, *La Christologie de Hegel: Verbum Crucis* (tr. B. Pottier, Paris: Beauchesne, 1982); Dale Schlitt, *Hegel's Trinitarian Claim: A Critical Reflection* (Leiden: Brill, 1984); Andrew Shanks, *Hegel's Political Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); Cyril O'Regan, *The Heterodox Hegel* (New York: SUNY, 1994). For a superb overview of how Hegel is generally taken to handle the different doctrinal loci in the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, see Martin Wendte, *Gottmenschliche Einheit bei Hegel: Eine logische und theologische Untersuchung* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2007), pp. 232–279. Wendte notes that the big Christological studies of the 1970s by Küng and Yerkes failed to say anything of significance about the unity of the divine and human natures (Wendte, *Gottmenschliche Einheit*, p. 52); Brito does have an account of this, however, both in the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* (Brito, *La Christologie*, pp. 287–295) and in the *Encyclopaedia* (pp. 510–516). Wendte brings out much more dramatically than Brito the logical significance of this unity, however, and brings it to bear on a discussion of the *Science of Logic*, which Brito does not consider significant. Many of my claims echo those of Wendte. O'Regan towers above them in the subtlety with which Hegel's theological thinking is reconstructed and placed in its various contexts (including Luther, Boehme, and the Gnostic traditions).

philosophy for theology today. Part of the answer to that question about significance can be summed up in one name: Aristotle.

Hegel's philosophy is, as I read its contributions to logic, a modern reauthoring of a series of Aristotelian insights.⁴ His thinking is dynamic and teleological; it generates extraordinarily technical meditations on ordinary practices of thinking; it is interested in the difference between investigations into phenomena (in Aristotelian terms: *Physics*) and investigations that are simultaneously into phenomena and the categories that describe them (in Aristotelian terms: *Metaphysics*); it is dialectical rather than deductive; it undermines and repairs false oppositions; it is ultimately interested in God.

Each of these requires further elucidation, but it is probably useful to have them laid out in this bald way at the outset. It should be clear that the primary interest here is philosophical rather than theological, but in such a way that philosophy cannot be readily split off from theology. Just as any serious study of Aquinas propels the reader to study Aristotle, so any serious study of Barth and his contemporaries and successors should stimulate serious study of Hegel. Putting it this way reveals a problem for contemporary theology. We teach Aquinas in our theological courses perhaps without enough attention to Aristotle, and we certainly teach Barth and his contemporaries without proper study of Hegel. In fact, in some well-known institutions we tend to teach theology as if it is such a different discipline from philosophy that we often engage in the disastrous practice of sending theologians off to the philosophy faculty to learn their philosophy. In many universities this is almost guaranteed to mean they receive a diet deficient in classical Greek or modern German philosophy. Theological students today are more likely to read Derrida than Hegel, and more likely to read Žižek than Aristotle. In no imaginable universe can this be a good thing.

This book will test five claims about Hegel's logic: (1) it is a product of reflecting on Christian doctrine; (2) it is concerned with pairs of terms; (3) it stands independently of his heterodox doctrinal experiments; (4) its generativity for theology can be seen more clearly if one ignores those doctrinal experiments; (5) such doctrinal experiments are in any case fewer than sometimes supposed. The chapters on the *Phenomenology of Spirit* and the *Science of Logic* will develop the first two of these claims. The fifth claim will form the substance of the chapter on the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*; the third and fourth claims are the concern of the study as a whole. Aspects of these claims can be briefly introduced in advance.

⁴ Hegel's relation to Aristotle has been researched thoroughly. See Alfredo Ferrarin, *Hegel and Aristotle* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001) and Terry Pinkard, *Hegel's Naturalism: Mind, Nature, and the Final Ends of Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

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First, the claim about the “doctrinal” shape of Hegel’s logic. Hegel’s thinking (in my reading) will strike theologians as bearing a remarkable structural similarity to certain aspects of doctrinal theology. The reason for this may be because Hegel was, in fact, rather interested in doctrinal theology, as is amply evidenced in his *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*. To see this structural similarity, I echo some fascinating insights in Martin Wendte’s recent study of Hegel.⁵ We can take for example the latter part of the Chalcedonian formula of AD 451 and the logic it displays in relation to the full divinity and full humanity of Christ:

one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, Only-begotten, recognized in two natures, without confusion, without change, without division, without separation; the distinction of natures being in no way annulled by the union, but rather the characteristics of each nature being preserved and coming together to form one person and subsistence, not as parted or separated into two persons, but one and the same Son and Only-begotten God the Word, Lord Jesus Christ.

The logic this formula displays is one in which the two principal terms (divinity and humanity) are related to each other in various ways. The logic that governs these relations rules out reduction of the two terms to a single term; it also rules out separation of the two terms so that they are opposed to each other; the relation of the two terms is simultaneously a union and a preservation of the difference between the two terms, in this case by predicating union of “person” and difference of “natures.” This is a sophisticated logic which generates non-biblical terms like “person” and “nature” in order to handle the relation between the principal terms “divine” and “human.” Starting with the next chapter, on the *Phenomenology*, I echo Wendte’s claim that Hegel thinks in a distinctly “Chalcedonian” fashion.

Consider also the errant logics that guide the various heresies that have been tried out from time to time in the Church. Arianism names the view that the Son of God was created and not divine. Apollinarianism (a reaction against Arianism) names the view that Jesus had a human body but a divine mind. Pelagianism names the view that salvation can be achieved by unaided human will, and does not rely on divine grace. Semipelagianism (a reaction against Pelagianism) names the view that the beginning of faith can be achieved by unaided human will, but is completed through divine grace.

⁵ Wendte makes the Chalcedonian formula central to his account of the relation between logical and theological investigations (Wendte, *Gottmenschliche Einheit*, pp. 2–9). In a parallel way I make Chalcedon the model for describing Hegel’s distinctive logic of distinctness-in-inseparable-unity. Wendte’s inspiration for putting Chalcedon to work in this way seems to be certain Christological investigations of Christoph Schwöbel; I take my cue from J.G. Hamann, as will be seen in the next chapter.

All of these views were deemed heretical. Arianism and Apollinarianism display the same errant logic, even though they produce contrary judgments. The errant logic is one in which a pair of terms (“divine” and “human”) are falsely opposed to one another. Arianism denies divinity of Christ; Apollinarianism denies humanity of Christ. The repair of this errant logic, which is displayed in the logic of the Chalcedonian formula, is one in which the relation of the pair of terms is handled in a different, more complex way. Indeed, it handles them precisely as a “pair.” Pelagianism and Semipelagianism display the same errant logic, even though they produce contradictory judgments. The errant logic is one in which a pair of terms (“free will” and “grace”) are falsely opposed to one another. Pelagianism denies outright that grace is needed for salvation; Semipelagianism assigns free will to one period of salvation (the beginning of faith) and assigns grace to another (the growth of faith). The repair of this errant logic, which is displayed in the theology of Augustine, in works such as “On Nature and Grace,” is one in which the relation of the pair of terms is again handled in a different, more complex way. Most historical accounts of these developments concentrate on the condemnation of heresy, and the production of doctrines which articulate a position which becomes dominant. It is far more interesting to investigate the logics of the heresies and the logics of the doctrines which replace them. In nearly every case, the errant logics are those which produce false oppositions, and the reparative logics are those which overcome those false oppositions, and generate different relations between pairs of terms. A purely historical account is one in which one side happens to win out over the other. A logical analysis is one in which one can see distinct forms of reasoning at work, and can see that the heretical logic “must” fail, in a sense, because the production of false oppositions produces its own collapse in the long run. Hegel thinks in a recognizably orthodox way, in one sense, not because he holds one doctrinal view rather than another, but because he is often repairing errant logics which produce false oppositions.

Karl Barth famously wondered if Hegel might become for Protestant theology what Aquinas eventually became for the Catholic tradition.⁶ This way of putting things is guilty of its own false opposition, in this case between Protestant and Catholic theologies (which, in the decades since Barth’s death, have come to have a highly complex relation that is other than one of mutual exclusion, and Hegel can be just as much of a Catholic inspiration as a Protestant one), but it undoubtedly captures something of Hegel’s promise for theology. Barth’s question can be repaired and reformulated as follows. Might it be possible that Hegel might become for modern theology what Augustine became for patristic theology? Just as Augustine repaired the errant logics of heresies which produced false oppositions between nature

⁶ Barth, “Hegel,” p. 384.

and grace, so Hegel repaired the errant logics of modern philosophies which produced false oppositions between subject and object and above all between thinking and being. So long as Christian theologies perpetuate errant logics which falsely oppose nature and grace, Augustine will not command the respect which is his due. In the same way, so long as Christian theologies perpetuate errant logics which falsely oppose subject and object, thinking and being, the same goes for Hegel. This way of putting it also accounts much more satisfactorily than Barth for Hegel's failure to become a titan of modern theology in the way that Augustine and Aquinas did in their ages. This is not to suggest that one should "agree" with Hegel, any more than one needs to endorse Augustine's theological claims in order to recognize his genius. Rather, it is to point out what the real obstruction to recognizing Hegel's greatness is. It is Hegel's generation of alternative logics which is the problem: his readers are often guided by logics that are errant, from Hegel's perspective, and their attempts to interpret him are doomed to failure until they grasp the reparative logics he generates, in his tireless assault on false oppositions of various kinds.

Hegel thinks "like Augustine" and "like Chalcedon," but this likeness is more at the level of logic than of doctrinal affirmation. (His logical insights are quite compatible with such doctrinal affirmation, however, as can be seen in the Hegelian shape of thinking one can discern in some of Rowan Williams' thinking about the incarnation.⁷ Hegel's doctrinal experiments are far less easily reconciled with such theology and in my view can be treated quite independently of the logics he develops.) It is for this reason that any attempt to appreciate Hegel (and such appreciation goes much deeper than, and often in a contrary direction to, his particular theological claims) must engage with the *Science of Logic*, and cannot remain satisfied with considering the particular doctrinal recommendations that Hegel makes (which are in any case fewer than often supposed). In this study, for polemical reasons, I almost completely ignore Hegel's doctrinal claims in order to focus on the logics he produces. My aim is to encourage theologians to recognize Hegel's logical investigations as reparative for philosophy and generative for theology, and this aspect of his thinking stands quite independently of his views on, for example, the deficiency of the traditional doctrine of the Trinity.

Second, we can consider in a little detail the claim about pairs of terms. It is worth clarifying my use of the term "pair," which will pervade the analysis of Hegel in this study. This is my own logical device for identifying the logic of the *Science of Logic*. Hegel does not often use the word "pair," and certainly not as emphatically as I am going to in the course of my

⁷ See Rowan Williams, "Beginning with the Incarnation," in *On Christian Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), pp. 79–92.

commentary.⁸ (1) A pair is not two things that happen to be in relation. *A pair is two things, where each is what it is because of its relation to the other.* Two people going on their first date can be taken as a pair only in an attenuated way. A couple who have been married for twenty years can be taken (even by themselves) as two opposed terms or they can be taken as a pair: it hardly needs to be said that how things turn out may depend on which logic is operative. Flesh and spirit in St. Paul can be taken as opposed terms or as a pair, and how one takes them makes a significant difference to one's scriptural interpretation. Being and nothing can be taken as opposed terms or, as for Hegel, they can be taken as a pair. The term "being" has the scope it has because of its relation to the scope of "nothing." (2) A pair is not one thing with two parts. *A pair is two things, where each is distinct from the other, but each cannot be adequately described independently of its relation to the other.* One can describe each of the persons who has been married for twenty years, and it is not a mistake to try to describe just one of them. An adequate description of that one, however, will involve some account of his/her relation to the spouse – the other, and also some account of his/her being as a married person. (3) Pair-talk is triadic. This sounds absurd, on the face of it. Surely pair-talk is binary! It is in fact triadic. In the case of the married couple, there is the husband, the wife, and their relation in marriage. *If one subtracts the third term – their relation – one has two terms and not a pair.* In the case of many pairs the third dimension is often a language, or an institution, or a history: the first term is related to the second term by virtue of both being terms in the same context of use. Words have meanings because of the other words to which they are related. (4) To identify a pair is not to have reached the limit of relations between terms. There could be three terms in relation to each other, or four or... But a pair is the simplest form of this kind of relation. The minimum number for a phenomenon of this kind is three: two terms and their relation.

A coin with two faces is not easily taken as a pair: it is one coin. A snail in a shell is not easily taken as a pair: it is one snail. Bread and butter is an interesting case. It could be taken as two things that happen to be related to each other; it could be taken as one thing with two elements; it could be taken as a pair: in the moment of eating there are two things, where each tastes the way it does because of its relation to the other. The case of bread and butter shows that "a pair" is a logical, rather than an ontological, term. *A pair is a pair because of how its terms are taken, not because of what something is.* A pair is not part of a scientific system of classification, but a logical term that can be operative in any system of classification whatsoever. To talk of

⁸ But see Hegel, *The Science of Logic* (tr. G. Di Giovanni, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 92; Hegel, *Science of Logic* (tr. A.V. Miller, London: Allen & Unwin, 1969), p. 119.

pairs is to draw attention to how things are considered rather than to their essential properties. There are pears but not pairs in the world. Assigning the term “pair” to two terms is a logical operation that governs how the relation between the two terms is to be described. It does not determine what kind of thing one is dealing with. It is this kind of distinction that is in play when I say that we are considering logical rather than ontological issues.

Third, we can take the strong claim about taking Hegel’s philosophy independently of his theology. If one wishes to know what implications Hegel’s thinking has in relation to Christology or the Trinity there are thoroughly researched monographs, some of them available in English.⁹ There can be no doubt that Hegel has been read in such a way as to influence the substance, and not just the shape, of theologians’ doctrinal claims.¹⁰ In my view this is one of those areas where the historically effective Hegel (the Hegel who changed how we think) is different from the textual Hegel (the texts we can read for ourselves). Hegel derived logical forms from Christian doctrines, especially the doctrine of the Trinity, but these logical forms are not themselves doctrinal formulations. Talk of false oppositions, or of pairs, is not doctrinal talk, although one may use such terms in order to clarify what effects doctrinal formulations have on how we think about the kinds of relations things have to each other. Hegel may well have an identifiable Christology or Trinitarian theology (although I am more circumspect about this than others). He certainly has a great deal to say about Christology and the Trinity, however, in the service of developing certain philosophical (and especially logical) insights. This is less often noticed.

Talking in this way obviously presupposes a certain way of distinguishing philosophy and theology, and this needs to be spelled out a little. I generally suppose that theology concerns itself with ontological claims whereas philosophy deals in shapes of thinking. Put differently, theology is a system of classification whereas philosophy investigates systems of classification. Theological questions take the form “when we say x, what sense does x have?” or “when we say x is y, is this true?” or “when we say x is y, what does this mean?”. The answers to these questions will be truth claims of various kinds. Philosophical questions take the form “how are the categories x and y generated?” or “what rules govern the predication of y to x?” or “what shape does this system of classification have?”. An example

⁹ Brito, *La Christologie*; James Yerkes, *The Christology of Hegel* (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1978); Schlitt, *Hegel’s Trinitarian Claim*; O’Regan, *Heterodox Hegel*; Wendte, *Gottmenschlische Einheit*.

¹⁰ See Schlitt, “German Idealism’s Trinitarian Legacy,” in Nicholas Adams (ed.), *The Impact of Idealism*, vol. 4: *Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming). The most obvious and infamous example is Moltmann’s claims about the first person of the Trinity in *The Crucified God*, which are unthinkable without considering Moltmann’s interpretation of Hegel.

may help. The question “is the logos pre-existent?” is a theological question which invites a theological answer. The question “what views of time are implied in various versions of the claim that the logos is pre-existent?” is a philosophical question which invites a philosophical answer. We can also take the Chalcedonian example. The question “in what sense is Jesus fully divine and fully human?” is theological. The question “what logic governs the relation of sameness and difference in the claim that Jesus is fully divine and fully human?” is philosophical. This way of distinguishing the disciplines is intended to clarify that they do not have distinct domains or objects of knowledge, but different ways of approaching the same phenomena. Theology investigates phenomena; philosophy investigates phenomena and categories simultaneously. Theology is rather like natural science: it classifies things. Philosophy is not like this at all: it asks about what kind of classification is in play and even asks about what kind of action classification is. I have also attempted to distinguish the disciplines in such a way as to make it very difficult to keep them wholly separate. Most theological question-and-answer will have moments of philosophical inquiry; all philosophical question-and-answer requires a prior “scientific” practice (whether theological or otherwise) on which to reflect.

It is in this sense that I claim that Hegel’s thought is best taken as philosophical rather than theological, if one is concerned with his continuing generativity for theology: his work reflects on prior theological practices and draws attention to the rules that govern them, to the systems of classification in play, and to the categories in which they cast their descriptions of God and the world. In this study I do not merely argue this; I show it through detailed commentary on texts.

Having suggested in a simplified way that Hegel is to Barth as Aristotle is to Aquinas, and having made it clear that Hegel is himself a kind of modern Aristotle in some of the interests and concerns he has, it is worth making explicit which questions of Hegel’s will be the focus of the textual commentary that follows.

Hegel asks the following questions, among many others. What is the relation between thinking and being? What is the relation between analogical and conceptual thinking? What is the relation between cognition and performativity? In Hegel’s terms: what are the relations between *Denken* and *Sein*, *Vorstellung* and *Begriff*, *Wissen* and *Tun*?

The key thing to notice, for our purposes, is that in Hegel’s logic, as in the Chalcedonian formula, we are dealing not with opposites that are separate, but with differences that are in relation. Hegel notices that modern philosophy very often deals with opposites that are separate, which then need to be brought back together again: individual and community, thinking and being, idea and thing, freedom and determinacy, mind and body, science and history, theology and philosophy, reason and revelation, faith and reason,

and so on. Hegel generally diagnoses these as false oppositions, and attempts to find an alternative logic in which they are different rather than opposed, in relation rather than separated. That means that the primary task is not to bring two separate things back together, but to refuse their primordial separation.

This is very strenuous work for modern thinkers who are constantly in the habit of opposing and separating. It is also strenuous work for interpreters of Hegel, where habits of opposing and separating struggle to do justice to Hegel's practices of differentiating and relating. The most obvious case is how to understand "God" in the final chapter of Hegel's *Phenomenology*, but it recurs repeatedly.

It is not a matter primarily of ontology, but of logic. Theologians today are wonderfully and imaginatively alive to the problems of comparative ontology. It is a commonplace in contemporary theology to notice that Christian ontologies with primary categories like friendship, love, gift, sin, grace, participation, exchange, service, and so forth generate very different descriptions of the world from ontologies with primary categories like competition, interest, control, management, consumption, leadership, and so on. Ontologies generate descriptions to live by. And Christians are called to live very differently indeed. It is not so obvious that theologians today are quite so alive to the problems of comparative logic. The Jewish philosopher Peter Ochs has strongly advocated a differentiation between binary and triadic logics, and he stands in a line of philosophers making innovative logical distinctions that are vital for theology.¹¹ These include R.G. Collingwood's account of "overlapping classes," C.S. Peirce's account of "thirdness," and Hegel's own account of the "concept." It is remarkable but perhaps not surprising that Hegel's *Science of Logic*, Peirce's "Description of a Notation for the Logic of Relatives," and Collingwood's *An Essay on Philosophical Method* remain a minority tradition in philosophy, and are not just under-represented on but completely absent from bibliographies intended for students of theology. It is not surprising because the model for "scientific" investigation of phenomena in the university is that of natural science, whose systems of classification are overwhelmingly (and rightly) binary. It is nonetheless remarkable that theologians should neglect this tradition, given the explicit triadicity of its most important doctrine of God, the Trinity.

This study will pursue questions of logic more than ontology. It is interesting to note that thinkers who produce triadic logics seem also to be strongly drawn to thinking historically (almost proto-ethnographically) about issues in thinking. It is possible that taking history as one's model for scientific endeavor, rather than the natural sciences, furnishes philosophical inquiry

¹¹ Peter Ochs, *Peirce, Pragmatism and the Logic of Scripture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

more readily with triadic logics. This might be because questions of meaning, and certain ways of understanding how meanings are made, where one has at some point to ask “for whom?” are utterly central to historical thinking, whereas they are somewhat incidental to the natural sciences. As soon as one asks “for whom?” one is dealing with triadicity, because the object (1) has a meaning (2) for someone (3). Dilthey’s distinction between “explanation” (which he attributes to the natural sciences) and “understanding” (which he attributes to what we now call the humanities) expresses exactly this difference of emphasis, I think. In the tradition of Collingwood, Peirce, and Ochs I offer a further differentiation, within the sphere of “understanding,” between theology and philosophy, but always treat these disciplines as bound up with each other.

The relation between divine and human action underlies the three commentaries presented in this study. Hegel displays contrary tendencies as he handles this relation. This may prove somewhat frustrating for a certain kind of reader who wishes to know whether Hegel is “right” or not, or what his “position” is. It is very tempting to wonder what Hegel “really” means, or what his “final” views are, or how he settles affairs “at the end of the day.” This practice of reading is misplaced. Hegel does attempt to conclude his trains of reasoning in a satisfying way, but it is misleading to think that these conclusions resolve the various tensions.

An analogy – the sonata – may help explain what kind of reading is most fruitful in relation to Hegel. Most of us read philosophy as if we are listening to Mozart. Themes are presented melodically, in ways that contrast with each other. They are then developed in a controlled way, and finally restated in a resolution. The development is interesting and pleasing and often quite short. We should not read Hegel like this, however. We should read him as if we are listening to Beethoven (who was exactly contemporary with Hegel). Themes are not presented melodically, but as germs whose purpose is to be generative rather than tuneful. These themes do not only contrast with each other: they contain within themselves – and display from the outset – myriad possibilities for development. Development gets under way from the start. When the “development” arrives it is not controlled or brief, in the way in which it is generally handled in Mozart. The development is long, dramatic, and often urgent. The germs can be utterly transformed, and can blossom into forceful moments of astonishing reimagining and drama. The restatement of the themes at the end is not only a resolution of the argument (although that too), but is also a new moment of hearing. What is formally “the same” is heard as different, because of what happened during the development. The development is the primary context for hearing the resolution.

Reading Kant is a bit like listening to Mozart. Neither is devoid of drama, nor of development. But there is order, structure, and a clarity of

statement at each stage. Reading Hegel is more like listening to Beethoven. There is a wildness, a genuine and self-conscious *history*, in the development of the germs. Consider the sheer length of Beethoven's *Eroica* symphony (1805) and the length of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807), or the almost tuneless construction out of germs of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony (1808) and the astonishing construction out of a single germ of Hegel's *Science of Logic* (1812–16). For one's foremost question to be, "what is Hegel's conclusion?" is as crass as to press fast forward on the remote during a Beethoven symphony. The length, and the manner of composition, are not ephemera. They are central to the kind of thing they are, and need to be attended to. It is thus all the more striking that many philosophers who read the *Phenomenology* lose interest after the "Consciousness" chapter, that is to say, after the first fifth of the book. (In the same way most folk hum the first, and only the first, bars of Beethoven's Fifth.) The brilliant dramatic heart of the development, "The Enlightenment struggle against superstition," comes well after the half-way point. This, if nothing else, should be required reading for theologians.¹² Hegel's works are long for the same reason that Beethoven's are: there is just a lot of development in them.

This study takes a significant risk in its selection of material for commentary. I have chosen to interpret the final parts of three classic texts. This might seem rather ill conceived given my remarks just now about development. There is no doubt some truth to that suspicion. The selection is made according to a different, more pressing, criterion, namely the relation of divine and human action, and the needs of theologians who might engage Hegel's philosophy. An adequate treatment would require a series of full-length commentaries. Few have managed even a single commentary on a work of Hegel's, let alone a series of them.

The reader is entitled to know what the shape of this study is, despite these protestations about the nature of commentary, the presence of contrary tendencies, and the need to attend to development and not only conclusions in the work of these contemporaries of Beethoven. The spur for the study was a hypothesis that Hegel brings divine and human action very close together indeed, because of his concern to repair the false opposition of being and thinking. The texts were chosen in order to test this hypothesis. My conclusions did not turn out quite so neatly, as happens very often when one is interested in the questions answered in the details of texts rather than in overviews of the positions adopted by thinkers.

I have found that Hegel "conceives" divine and human action very closely indeed, and that this is because he refuses to think the "being" of God

¹² This part of the *Phenomenology* is not treated in this book. For a commentary on it see Adams, "Faith and Reason," in Adams (ed.), *The Impact of Idealism*, vol. 4: *Religion*.

independently of thinking the “thinking” of human beings. There appears to be an (if not the) eclipse of grace. To speak of grace is to acknowledge human sin, to affirm that we need help, to recognize that this help is perpetually available, and to discern signs of that help in the life of the world, the community, and the Church. These multiple acknowledgments require a prior acknowledgment of what Kierkegaard called the infinite qualitative difference between God and humanity. Hegel does not deny such a difference. But the logic of his arguments tends to undermine it, or appear to undermine it, in various ways that are difficult to summarize. I will try, nonetheless. For Hegel there is, in our thinking, no “being” of God over and against our “thinking.” When we think *God*, we think God. This is not to say that when we think of God we are really thinking of ourselves (Feuerbach). We can come at things from the opposite end. Absolute knowing is the self-consciousness of Spirit in which the object thought and the subject thinking are one. This is not to say that human thinking is really absorbed into God’s thinking (what Robert Pippin has called “the great devouring Maw”). When the false opposition of thinking and being is overcome, the opposition of God’s being to human thinking is no longer available. We cannot say that Hegel “reduces” everything to human thinking, or that Hegel “absorbs” everything into divine being. To say these things is to reinstate the false opposition between thinking and being. This is, of course, what many commentators do when they criticize Hegel. But they completely miss the point of the whole exercise in so doing. One can (and perhaps theologians should) have severe misgivings about that whole exercise if it abolishes *thinking* the infinite qualitative difference. But those misgivings will need to be cast in ways that do justice to Hegel’s attempt to repair the false opposition between being and thinking. That, I have found, is rather hard to do. It probably can only be accomplished by thinking historically and ethnographically about the ways in which the shapes of human thinking are constituted, challenged, and reformed. Hegel does just that, in the *Phenomenology*. It is the moment of “de-tensing” (O’Regan) or “detemporalizing” manifest in “the concept” that seems to provoke the misgivings. If one can get that aspect right, it is possible that a number of difficulties may be raised to a more satisfactory level, even if not satisfactorily resolved.

The final introductory comments here concern what kind of metaphysics is to be found in Hegel. I take it as beyond doubt that there is metaphysics here. “Post-metaphysical” readings of Hegel confront an overwhelming burden in producing textual warrants, which is why post-metaphysical readings of Hegel tend not to take the form of commentary on texts but of bold overview. The shape of Hegel’s thinking in relation to “spirit” is unquestionably metaphysical. The question is: what *kind* of metaphysics?

Here it is helpful to distinguish two distinct forms of metaphysics that display themselves in German philosophy after Kant. I shall name these

“epic metaphysics” and “dramatic metaphysics.”¹³ Epic metaphysics establishes the true nature of reality, from a position of supreme insight (often an intuition), and then attempts to fit human action into that frame. Dramatic metaphysics names the description of human action as “in the middle of things,” from the center of the action, and the attempt to generate its account of reality from out of that middle. The best attacks on metaphysics are rejections of epic metaphysics. The best defenses of metaphysics are elaborations of dramatic metaphysics.

Hegel displays both tendencies in his work. The de-tensing that is displayed in his account of the concept in the *Science of Logic* has a strongly epic metaphysical quality to it. The historical and proto-ethnographic concerns of the *Phenomenology* have an unmistakably dramatic metaphysical character. The only way to determine which of these predominates in Hegel’s work is to de-tense one’s own reading of Hegel’s texts, a practice of which I remain suspicious. It is much more satisfying, in my view, to acknowledge the presence of contrary tendencies and then to try to keep track of them in one’s reading. This will be the task before us as we turn to the texts.

¹³ The distinction between epic and dramatic (and the third term, lyric) is Platonic, and developed by Hegel himself in his *Lectures on Aesthetics*. The distinction drawn here is made by Andrew Bowie in his *Music, Philosophy and Modernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), and adapted using the Hegelian terms elaborated by Ben Quash in his study of von Balthasar. See Bowie, *Music*, pp. 32–40; Ben Quash, *Theology and the Drama of History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

Absolute Knowing

Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* is resistant to overviews offered in advance. This facet of the text provokes many of its interpreters to make strong claims about its difficulty. The *Phenomenology* is allegedly one of the most difficult texts in the history of philosophy, and the final chapter, entitled "Absolute Knowing," is said to be its most obscure part. The prospects for an intelligible interpretation of this chapter would seem poor.

The purpose of this study is, however, not to provide an overview of the ideas of Hegel. There are many books that do that, and there is no plausible excuse for another. This study's purpose is to interpret particular texts in a way that notices aspects that are of interest to theologically minded readers, and to pay attention to signs of the eclipse of grace, that is to say, to indications that the relation between divine and human action is distorted through the collapse of the distinction to the point where there is no difference between them. Its purpose is also to notice Hegel's development of an alternative logic, a development that is bound up with his interest in Christian doctrines.

Claims about the legendary difficulty of the text as a whole, and of this chapter in particular, are odd phenomena that invite investigations of their own. There are, after all, a number of readable commentaries in English on the *Phenomenology*.¹ It is the experience of nearly every reader who studies

¹ Of the many studies of the *Phenomenology*, the most useful texts available in English for theologians are Jean Hyppolite's *Genesis and Structure of Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit* (tr. S. Cherniak and J. Heckman, Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1974); Quentin Lauer, *A Reading of Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit* (New York: Fordham, 1993); H.S. Harris, *Hegel's Ladder II: The Odyssey of Spirit* (Cambridge: Hackett, 1997); and Kenneth

the text with the German and English texts side by side, with two or three good commentaries to hand, that a reliable sense of Hegel's project (and of the principal interpretative debates) emerges rather quickly. The text requires some effort on the part of the interpreter, but if one makes that effort it is not a calamitous mystery. It is perhaps comparable with Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, Spinoza's *Ethics*, or Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* – which are, indeed, three of the most useful texts to read alongside the *Phenomenology*, as they are the texts that furnish Hegel with his basic philosophical building blocks.

The shape of the *Phenomenology* as a whole is a topic that allegedly poses deep problems for the reader. The text is in three parts, entitled "Consciousness," "Self-Consciousness," and "Reason." These three sections contain within them eight chapters, entitled "Sense Certainty," "Perception," "Force and the Understanding," "The Truth of Self-Certainty," "The Certainty and Truth of Reason," "Spirit," "Religion," and "Absolute Knowing." And, within these chapters, there are various sub-headings. Trying to discern the genre of the text is difficult because it is not in an established genre. Interpreting the text in a way that conforms to established patterns of reasoning in modern philosophy is difficult because the text calls those patterns of reasoning into question. This is why the text is resistant to overviews in advance: a good overview needs to conform to established patterns of reasoning, and needs to give some account of the genre of the work. But this is also why the best advice to the systematic theologian is to get reading, rather than wonder in a self-defeating way what it is one is about to read. The *Phenomenology* is a classic text: that is reason enough to give it a go.

Owing to the proposed focus here on the final chapter, more than just diving in to the text is required. The best way to read the *Phenomenology* is to try to reconstruct the questions to which the text is a series of answers. This is the task that R.G. Collingwood (himself influenced by the *Phenomenology*, partly via Croce) assigns to any serious philosophical interpreter of classic texts, and it applies in an exemplary way to this one. The main question that nearly all interpreters agree Hegel poses is the question posed by Pontius Pilate to Jesus in John's Gospel, in chapter 18: "What is truth?". Theologically oriented readers might find it useful to start with that, and proceed from there.

The *Phenomenology* addresses the question of truth again and again, repeatedly, from different angles. Different answers are rehearsed and explored from within the philosophical perspectives that first articulated

Westphal's recent collection of essays in *The Blackwell Guide to Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009). Each of these commentaries is attentive to the text and offers a readily intelligible account. Undergraduate students report that one of the most accessible commentaries is Robert Stern, *Routledge Philosophy Guidebook to Hegel and Phenomenology of Spirit* (London: Routledge, 2001).

these answers. The history of philosophy, which for Hegel accompanies the history of human cultures, is a history of dissatisfactions with a variety of answers, a history of failed perspectives, and a history of renewed attempts to investigate truth. Hegel generally does not merely describe points of view. He rehearses and performs them.

Truth, life, and love are three principal themes in John's Gospel, and they are the three principal themes in Hegel's *Phenomenology* too. They are accompanied by the subsidiary themes of recognition, reconciliation, and service – also obviously Johannine themes. Hegel's more peculiar terms (e.g. representation, concept, sublation) are entirely in the service of these principal themes, although they (and not the principal themes) are often what attract the attention of commentators. His development of these Johannine themes is done philosophically, as one would expect, and the philosophy Hegel uses is broadly Aristotelian, with a strong emphasis on motion, teleology, and an attempt to account for the difference between investigations into things and investigations into thinking. There is as yet no commentary on the *Phenomenology* that does justice to the Johannine content and the Aristotelian form.² Hegel's concern with truth might not strike anyone as particularly Johannine – it is obviously a basic philosophical concern – were it not that it is very frequently connected with life from the Preface onwards, and also with love. It is not the concern with truth or with life or with love, considered separately, that marks Hegel's concerns as manifestly Johannine, but the treatment of these three terms in relation to each other: this pervades the *Phenomenology*.³ This is not merely of passing interest, or of interest only to theologically minded readers (who might otherwise be thought to be

² Jean Hyppolite's discussion of motion in Hegel (*Genesis and Structure*, pp. 143–155) does not acknowledge Aristotle at all, although it heavily emphasizes Spinoza, thus making the association but leaving it implicit. Quentin Lauer tells the reader in a footnote that Hegel is indebted to Aristotle. See Lauer, *A Reading*, p. 100, n. 7. Robert Stern makes the claim in a parenthesis. See Stern, *Routledge Philosophy Guidebook*, p. 88. Much more satisfactory is the guide edited by Kenneth Westphal. Aristotle is not merely cited as an influence: Hegel's philosophy is shown to be Aristotelian through explicit comparisons. See especially Allegra de Laurentiis' commentary on the "Absolute Knowing" chapter: Laurentiis, "Absolute Knowing," in Westphal (ed.), *Blackwell Guide*, pp. 246–264. None of these texts finds Hegel's Johannine language worthy of discussion.

³ Emilio Brito traces the Johannine inflection in Hegel's work back to the early discussion of the religious teaching of Jesus in *The Spirit of Christianity and its Fate*; see Brito, *La Christologie de Hegel: Verbum Crucis* (tr. B. Pottier, Paris: Beauchesne, 1983), p. 68. Brito cites Francis Guibal's *Dieu selon Hegel* (1975) when indicating that Hegel's connection of spirit with the death of Jesus Christ is a specifically Johannine topos: Francis Guibal, *Dieu selon Hegel: essai sur la problématique de la Phénoménologie de l'esprit* (Paris: Aubier Montaigne, 1975), p. 165. For other reflections on Johannine language see Hans Küng, *The Incarnation of God: An Introduction to Hegel's Theological Thought as Prolegomena to a Future Christology* (tr. J. Stephenson, London: Crossroad, 1987), p. 423; Benedict Viviano, "The Spirit in John's Gospel: A Hegelian Perspective," *Freiburger Zeitschrift für Philosophie und Theologie*, 43 (1996), pp. 368–387.

interested in John's Gospel). It is the relation of the terms to each other that is of interest, and this should attract the notice of any reader.

The *Phenomenology* is a dramatic text. Perspectives are generally explored on their own terms, "from the inside" as it were. Many possible approaches to truth are considered, from their own perspective, with special attention to failures, breakdowns, and dissatisfactions, from which new settlements emerge in cultures and thus in the philosophies that arise in those cultures. Hegel calls these perspectives "shapes" and he is interested in what causes one shape to cease to be satisfying and a new shape to take its place. The first shape to be considered is a kind of naïve empiricism, in which truth is equated with bare sensuous experience. This turns out to be inadequate. The final shape is that of "absolute knowing," in which a fully adequate account of truth is laid out.

Many approaches to Hegel's text are focused on questions of ontology: on the primary categories that drive the narrative, and the role they play in questions of truth. This is certainly a respectable and fruitful approach: such terms as "spirit," "self-consciousness," "moment," "shape," "movement" (or "motion"), "whole," and many others merit such investigation into ontology. But it is vital that ontological questions are accompanied by logical ones when reading Hegel.⁴ Such terms as "dialectic," "negation," and "sublation" serve logical functions for Hegel, and even terms like "concept" should attract logical as much as ontological attention. Hegel himself draws attention to this in his *History of Philosophy*, when discussing Aristotle's *Metaphysics*. He points out that others refer to this set of investigations as an ontology, whereas he will refer to it as a logic.⁵ As indicated in the Introduction, Hegel is guided by a "Chalcedonian" logic. By this I mean that his tendency is to describe certain terms as distinct but in relation, rather than as utterly opposed to each other (or as identical to each other). Hegel is a modern philosopher, and he is greatly interested in forms of thought, which he inherits, in which terms are falsely or one-sidedly opposed to each other. These include a variety of pairs of terms such as: thinking and being, subject and object, individual and community, concept and thing. Modern philosophy, for Hegel, is often guilty of opposing these. For example, Descartes claims that there is *res cogitans* and *res extensa*, and these are quite separate. Kant claims (on certain interpretations) that there are concepts which guide judgment, and things which elude knowledge. It is

⁴ The two commentators who bring out the logical investigations most clearly are Stephen Houlgate and John Burbidge. See Houlgate, *The Opening of Hegel's Logic: From Being to Infinity* (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 2006), and Burbidge, *Hegel's Systematic Contingency* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

⁵ Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, vol. 2: *Plato and the Platonists* (tr. E.S. Haldane and F.H. Simson, London: University of Nebraska, 1995), p. 138.

worth noticing that these are ontological claims, about what kinds of thing there are (e.g. different kinds of *res*, or distinctions between concepts and things). Hegel's repair is not primarily ontological, however. He does not merely substitute new or revised kinds of thing. It is much more significant that his repairs are logical. Where others see oppositions, Hegel sees what I am calling "pairs." For Hegel, modern philosophy is marked by a turn to the subject, which he applauds, and a splitting of the subject from the object, which he rejects. Terms like "subject" and "object" are logical more than ontological, as are actions like "splitting." What Chalcedon says of the divine and human natures of Christ, Hegel says of the subject and the object. Using a Chalcedonian schema we can say they are

to be acknowledged in two . . . inconfusedly, unchangeably, indivisibly, inseparably; the distinction . . . being by no means taken away by the union, but rather the property of each . . . being preserved, and concurring in one . . . not parted or divided into two . . . but one and the same . . .

Hegel follows the logic of this position, which is a logic in which there are two terms which are distinct from each other and yet inseparably in relation. This is most clearly stated in what is now named (although not by Hegel) the "principle of consciousness" in the *Phenomenology's* Introduction: "Consciousness *distinguishes* something from itself and at the same time it *relates* itself to it" (§52). The logic of the Chalcedonian formula displays a concern with "two" in relation to each other such that there is "one." This is a triadic logic, in which there is a first term, a second term, and the relation between them.

To understand this logic, one needs to grasp that what there is one of, and what there are two of, are not the same. The Chalcedonian formula speaks of two natures and one person. It emphatically denies that there is one nature or two persons. One can be (and many theologians are) primarily concerned with the ontology implied in such terms as "nature" and "person." But a logical interest in the Chalcedonian formula is actually not so focused on the ontology, but on the relation: this is a logical matter. The logic has strict rules, and if these rules are broken, the theology that ensues is ruinous. Hegel follows this logic in the *Phenomenology* remarkably closely. He speaks of two (or more) "moments" and one "concept." Subjectivity and objectivity are moments: they are distinct from each other, and are not reducible the one to the other. But they are united in the concept, which expresses the relation between the two moments.

For those unfamiliar with the Chalcedonian logic first articulated in this explicit form in the year 451, by a church council that met in a town that is now part of Istanbul, Hegel's claims are easily misunderstood. One way to misunderstand them is to be interested only in ontology, and to neglect logic.

But another misunderstanding arises if one acknowledges only one possible logic. If one discounts in advance a logic in which there can be a kind of “one” in which “two” remain distinct but are inseparably in relation, then some alternative logic needs to guide one’s interpretation. Given that we are modern interpreters, the most readily available logic to hand will be (in Hegel’s view) one in which “two” are opposed to each other. That is, it will be a logic in which a double opposition is displayed. The first opposition is between the “two.” The second, deeper, opposition requires that “one” and “two” are alternatives. We can re-engineer the Chalcedonian formula (and thus render it heretical) to reflect this oppositional logic.

to be acknowledged either in two . . . inconfusedly, unchangeably, divisibly, separably; or in one, the distinction . . . being taken away by the union, where the property of each . . . is not preserved, not parted nor divided into two . . . but one and the same . . .

Hegel sees this oppositional logic at work in much modern philosophy, and he seeks to repair it through a Chalcedonian logic. His name for this Chalcedonian logic is simply “the concept.” Hegel’s account of Kant is of this kind.⁶ Hegel interprets Kant’s transcendental idealism as one which opposes subject to object, and which resolves this opposition on the side of the subject. Kant is to be applauded for insisting that philosophy must be an account of the relation of subject to object, rather than only of the object (transcendental realism) or only of the subject (empirical idealism). For transcendental realists, the conditions for knowledge are objects in the world. For empirical idealists, the conditions for knowledge are our ideas. Kant was right to critique this, in Hegel’s view. But Kant’s solution was to divide the conditions for knowledge into sensible intuitions (the objective) and concepts (the subjective) which are then united in judgment. The intention to unite “two” in “one” (two “conditions” in one “judgment”) is sound. But judgment is firmly on the side of the subjective, rather than reflecting a genuine relation between subject and object. And the effect of this is to say that we know “phenomena” and cannot know “noumena.” We can cognize appearances, but we cannot cognize things in themselves. Hegel’s objection is not primarily to Kant’s ontology – an ontology in which there are phenomena and noumena, or appearances and things in themselves. It is wrong-headed to try to rehearse Hegel’s critique of Kant as a refusal of that ontology. Hegel’s primary objection is to the logic which guides the

⁶ Hegel’s account is one of many, and it is heavily influenced by its presentation by Reinhold and the critiques of this mounted by Fichte and Schelling. For a very different, more sympathetic, and more textually attentive interpretation, see Henry Allison, *Kant’s Transcendental Idealism: An Interpretation and Defense* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004).

account – a logic in which phenomena and noumena are opposed, where appearances and things in themselves are utterly separate.

This observation marks the appearance of a tendency in my interpretation of Hegel that will be dominant and pervasive. This is an insistence that Hegel's ontology (and his accounts of others' ontologies) is subservient to his logic. Hegel's ontology is marked by some unusual *dramatis personae*, and these are often taken to be exotica. They include "shapes of consciousness," "representation," "concept," "being in itself," "being for itself," "being in and for itself," "spirit." If one is focused on Hegel's ontology, then one has to investigate these exotica, and to offer some account of what kinds of thing they are. It is very fashionable in theology at the moment to be attentive to ontology, and to be adept in discerning rival ontologies. Many philosophers are likewise interested in what kind of "being" Hegel deals in, and what problems his account displays. Such an approach can generate important philosophical insights, but as one's sole reading of Hegel it will yield unsatisfactory fruits. Hegel's ontology, to repeat, is largely in the service of his logic. Hegel's logical, more than his ontological, terms should guide one's interpretation. These terms include "opposition," "mediation," "sublation," "unification," "reconciliation," and so forth. These logical terms are ways of relating "two" in "one," where "two" remain distinct but are inseparably in relation. To oversimplify for polemical purposes: when reading Hegel one should notice the verbs more than the nouns.

In my account of the *Phenomenology's* final chapter, I will not only focus on logical concerns, but will repeatedly distinguish two rival logical structures. The first I shall call a "logic of opposition," the second a "logic of distinction in inseparable relation" or, in a shorter form, a "logic of participation." In terms which might have more resonance for theologically minded readers, these are "Manichean logic" (which emphatically splits, with a view to forcing a decision between two rivals) and "Chalcedonian logic" (which preserves distinctions but emphatically refuses separation or identification). In Hegel's terms these are not named logics at all, but are simply "representation" (*Vorstellung*) and "concept" (*Begriff*). Readers who are ready to put this distinction to work will already be wondering whether the approach just laid out is remarkably Manichean: isn't it rather self-defeating to commend a Chalcedonian logic of relation in an argument whose structure resembles a Manichean logic of opposition? There are two ways briefly to answer this excellent observation.

The first is to say that the logic of opposition is the closer of the two to common-sense logic: it is what we normally do. Such phenomena as racism, sexism, ageism, religious discrimination, and many other common social phenomena are all guided by a logic of opposition. This list of social blights is misleading, however. It implies that a logic of opposition is somehow a bad thing that needs to be overcome. But a logic of opposition also guides law,

medicine, ethics, cooking, computer programming, bringing up children, and so on. One needs to determine: guilty or not guilty; rabies or not rabies; right or wrong; cooked or not cooked; one or zero; safe to cross the road or not safe, etc. Chalcedonian logic is thus not universally applicable: its scope is specific to certain kinds of case. These cases are generally speaking those in which sameness and difference do not call for opposition but for distinction in inseparable relation. A community in which different religious traditions live side by side is such a case. So is a family which includes members of different sexes. So is a village whose inhabitants display a wide age range. In certain cases a “common-sense logic” of opposition can lead to violence of various kinds, and it is a “wisdom logic” of distinction in inseparable relation that can lead to reconciliation and peace-making. So the first thing to say is that it may be helpful to render an initial account of the difference between Manichean and Chalcedonian logics in a common-sense (i.e. Manichean) way, because this is more readily understood. One could (and Hegel does) offer a more Chalcedonian logical analysis of the relation between the two, as we shall see.

The second thing to say is that it is not only common sense that displays a logic of opposition. Natural science does so too, and so our habits of opposition run deep if we take natural science as an authoritative guide for seeking the truth. It is the business of natural science to produce taxonomies in which phenomena are either this or that. Solid or liquid, reptile or mammal, covalent or ionic, charged or not charged, and so on. It is only in philosophy that Chalcedonian logic displaces Manichean logic in certain cases. These cases include self and other, subject and object, thinking and being, form and content, metaphysics and epistemology, etc. These are cases in which the two terms are distinct, but where one cannot do justice to either term without doing justice to its relation to the other. They are also cases that are not investigated by natural science. There is no natural science of “subject and object.” In this brief account, common sense is on the side of natural science, and wisdom is on the side of philosophy. This has a certain pleasing quality to it, given the etymology of philosophy. So the second thing to say is that when offering a taxonomy of logics, it is not surprising that an initial account might display a more natural-scientific habit of thinking, because the goal is to elaborate a distinction rather than handle a relation between terms. But we might certainly reach for a more philosophical way of thinking, once the distinction has been grasped, and we might suggest that “Manichean” and “Chalcedonian” logics are not simply opposed to one another, but are themselves constantly in relation to each other in our lives, and sometimes there is conflict and sometimes reconciliation.

Wisdom does not simply trump common sense, in other words. A good life is one which displays a beautiful or fitting relation between the two. It is often the failure of common-sense logic that stimulates the adoption

of wisdom logic in any particular case. There is often no need to adopt a wisdom logic if the common-sense logic is functioning well. In Hegel's terms the concept "sublates" the representation. In my terms (which I shall not force upon the reader in this study) "reparative" reasonings transform "descriptive" ones. In both cases, however, one needs to remember – and remember often – that "the concept" and "repair" are not the primary or essential marks of human intellectual life. "Representation" (*Vorstellung*) or "description" are rightly the fundamental or pervasive marks of that intellectual life. This is important to grasp, because one will go badly wrong with Hegel if one thinks that "thinking" is the realm of "the concept." Absolutely not. Representation and concept are, alike, the realm of thinking. Common sense and wisdom are *both* forms of thought. The difference lies in the function they discharge vis-à-vis certain kinds of case. In cases that call for reconciliation (which include cases like "subject" and "object," as well as racist attacks in the community) one needs Chalcedonian logic to displace Manichean logic; in these cases of crisis (and perhaps only in them) one needs philosophy to supersede natural science. Only when description fails is one stimulated to repair.

Reading the *Phenomenology* in this way has a marked effect on how one interprets the various chapters, starting with "Sense Certainty" and proceeding through to "Absolute Knowing." The *Phenomenology* will, in such an account, be the story of moments of wisdom that supervene on common sense, or moments of Chalcedonian logic that repair Manichean logic, or where the concept "sublates" representation. These moments have profound effects on epistemology and on ontology, but the ultimate payoff in the final chapter is not a better epistemology, nor a better ontology, but the grasping of an alternative logic that is always available, but (quite rightly) not always operative. The chapter "Absolute Knowing" has remarkably little to say about epistemology, in fact, which is liable to puzzle the reader who is not so interested in logic. There is not much payoff for "knowing" in this chapter on "absolute knowing."⁷ But the entire chapter, as we shall see, is an extraordinary performance of what Hegel sees as the only satisfactory logic of reconciliation, in which subjects and objects are distinct but inseparably in relation. The puzzled reader is liable to downplay the significance of the final chapter, and to say that the majority of the *Phenomenology* is about epistemology, and that the final chapter doesn't really fit, and is much better read as a transitional chapter to the *Science of Logic*, and a hangover from

⁷ Whatever reservations one has about the adequacy of Kojève's interpretation of the *Phenomenology* as a whole, he is clear and persuasive on this point about the "Absolute Knowing" chapter: "the problem is not to develop the *content* of absolute Knowledge." Alexander Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel: Lectures on the Phenomenology of Spirit* (ed. A. Bloom, tr. J. Nichols, New York: Cornell University Press, 1980), p. 31.

when Hegel envisaged the *Phenomenology* as the first volume in a set. That is a possible reading, and it has the obvious merit of attending to Hegel's stated aims in the Preface. But it does mean that certain features of the final chapter must be explained away. For example, it clearly begins with a reference to the previous chapter and seeks to advance on its substantial but limited gains. More significantly, the final chapter begins with a summary of the whole book, in which its lessons are spelled out. The continuity with the previous chapter and the précis of the entire course of the book are not the obvious marks of a final chapter which does not fit, and which is allegedly best read as the start of a set of new concerns. My reading has the merit of interpreting the chapter as the final chapter of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, which is what Hegel seems to have thought he was writing.

Different kinds of reader approach Hegel with different concerns. Theologically minded readers will bring a set of questions that are different from those of philosophers, historians, or political theorists. It thus seems wise to warn theologically minded readers about the reading practices of some philosophers, in particular, lest these become normative for theologically minded readers. By and large, philosophers do to Hegel's *Phenomenology* what they used to do to Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, namely, read the first part of the first part of it with admiration and ignore the second part. Philosophers would take great interest in Kant's transcendental analytic, whereas it was largely theologians who would attend to the transcendental dialectic (presumably because that is where all the stuff about God is to be found). This is not respectable practice for philosophers these days, and anyone who claims to interpret the *Critique of Pure Reason* is required to read the whole of the transcendental doctrine of elements. (It is still acceptable to ignore the second part, on the transcendental doctrine of method, and it is interesting to wonder whether this too may change.) Philosophers are most interested in the first three chapters of the *Phenomenology*, because this is where the focus is epistemology.⁸ Such a focus is also useful rhetorically, as it enables philosophers to commend Hegel's philosophy as relevant to contemporary philosophical concerns – especially those concerned with epistemology. This rhetoric is especially important when addressing philosophers who still assume that Hegel's philosophy is a riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma – an assumption that has the doubtless happy practical effect of freeing one of the burdens of textual interpretation. Such rhetoric has a striking feature, however. It presupposes that contemporary philosophy is what really matters, and that Hegel's importance lies in his ability

⁸ Kenneth Westphal's brilliant interpretations of Hegel's *Phenomenology* display this tendency, and it is worth noticing where his textual emphasis lies. See for example the framing discussion in Westphal, *Blackwell Guide*, pp. 1–36.

to speak to the concerns of today's philosophy. This is entirely the wrong way round, both historically and structurally. The reason that today's philosophy has the kinds of concern that Hegel can speak to is because Hegel spoke to them, and his thought shaped that of Croce, Cassirer, Heidegger, Gadamer, Adorno, Derrida, and Levinas. It also shaped that of Royce, Collingwood, Sellars, MacIntyre, Taylor, and many others. It is not the case that philosophy happens to have certain concerns, and that it is remarkable how Hegel remains of interest in the light of those concerns. He gave those concerns to philosophy, and it is remarkable how forgetful and ungrateful many philosophers are.

Philosophers who focus on the earlier parts of the *Phenomenology* are also likely to neglect the final chapter for another, rather mundane, reason: that final chapter offers a summary of the whole text, but the early "epistemological" chapters play a remarkably insignificant role in that summary. Hegel's focus is much more on the chapters from "Observing Reason" through to "Religion"; the earlier chapters are certainly mentioned, but then are placed to one side. For those interpreters who find Hegel's primary importance to lie in these early chapters, it looks as though Hegel has failed to understand the import of his own work. I take a different view, which is that Hegel is interested in overcoming false oppositions, and the more interesting specimens of false opposition are those that occur in the later chapters. That is why they are the focus of his account in the final chapter on absolute knowing.

Theologically minded readers should also be alert to the fact that, like Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, significant portions of the *Phenomenology* – and perhaps the very structure of the text – reflect a deep interest in God. There is an entire chapter whose title is "Religion," but even this is somewhat misleading, because large portions of the previous chapter on "Spirit" are also about religion, including the remarkable discussion of "The Enlightenment Struggle Against Superstition," which is a strong candidate for the most interesting part of any work of philosophy in the Western tradition. (If anyone is curious to know what damage errant logics do to social life, this discussion is a good place to begin. It is certainly a good way to get a sense of Hegel's dazzling intellect and penetrating insight, and his overwhelming concern with matters of ordinary life.) Hegel is interested in God, but many of his readers today are not (and indeed were not when he was writing, as he himself remarks from time to time), and this means that accounts of the *Phenomenology* often play down the more theological aspects, by treating them as literary devices which add a bit of color. It is true, without question, that Hegel is a philosopher rather than a theologian, but he is a philosopher who is genuinely and pervasively interested in theology. The very title *Phenomenology of Spirit* – and *Geist* should without doubt be

translated as spirit rather than mind – is saturated not only with theological but specifically Johannine concerns. If anyone doubts this, it is worth reading the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* from the 1820s, and then going back to the *Phenomenology*.

I offer, in sum, a rubric for distinguishing excellent from poor-quality interpretations of this final chapter of Hegel's *Phenomenology*:

- (1) The interpretation should be clearly derived from the details of the text, and not just from a consideration of “Hegelian” (let alone “contemporary”) concerns.
- (2) It should make sense of the Aristotelian frame which Hegel offers.
- (3) It should take seriously its continuities and discontinuities with the previous “Religion” chapter, and not treat Hegel's interest in religion as incidental.

Before beginning the work of interpretation it is worth making some brief remarks about the text. There are many published versions of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, and there are increasing numbers of translations. The critical German edition is Volume 9 of the *Collected Works*, edited by Wolfgang Bonsiepen and Reinhard Heede, published by Felix Meiner in 1980. The most commonly used English translation is by A.V. Miller, published by Oxford University Press in 1977. Miller introduced paragraph numbers in his translation, a practice continued (with minor variations) by Terry Pinkard in his recent parallel English/German edition which at the time of writing is available online, and may remain so until the book is published by Cambridge University Press.⁹ For the German I have used the paperback edition edited by Hans-Friedrich Wessels and Heinrich Clairmont, published by Meiner in 1987, which follows the Bonspielen/Heede critical edition but modernizes spellings and orthography; the Wessels/Clairmont edition preserves the pagination of the critical edition in the headers to each page and I have thus cited the critical edition's page numbers. For the English I have used Pinkard's superb translation, with occasional changes. It is superb in two ways: first it is an excellent translation, which is attentive to echoes of the *Lutherbibel* in the German; second it is a parallel English–German text, so the reader can range freely between the languages. Pinkard preserves the paragraph numberings introduced in Miller's 1977 translation. Not only have I kept these: the discussion primarily refers to them, on the grounds that most readers will be reading in translation.

⁹ The website for this translation has moved at least once since being posted. The latest working URL (as of August 2012) is <http://terrypinkard.weebly.com/phenomenology-of-spirit-page.html>.

The following reading of “Absolute Knowing” will thus display two dominant tendencies. First, it treats the text as pursuing logical inquiry, and second, it will be attentive to Hegel’s interest in theology. One of the effects of this theological interest is my assumption throughout that “God” is, for Hegel, not an object of knowledge, although Hegel quite rightly criticizes those philosophers (above all Kant) who deny that God can be known. The less theology one knows, the more confusing this stance is. As advertised in the Introduction, I propose to read the text and interpret it, rather than offer a detailed engagement with secondary literature on Hegel’s chapter.¹⁰

¹⁰ There is extensive commentary on the “Absolute Knowing” chapter. It is remarkable how varied the interpretations are. Hyppolite offers the classic philosophical interpretation that treats the chapter as a transition to the *Science of Logic*, and which presents Hegel’s main argument as the identity of self and being. Hyppolite calls this “ontologic,” “which is the thought of thought at the same time that it is the thought of all things” (Hyppolite, *Genesis and Structure*, p. 574). It can be seen that my own focus on overcoming the false opposition of thinking and being is heavily indebted to Hyppolite, although my account of the details departs from his. Lauer offers an emphatically “religious” interpretation in which Hegel’s account is a vindication of Christian speech about the knowledge of God. This, in turn, seems influenced by Michael Theunissen’s *Hegels Lehre*, especially those aspects concerned with the relationship between self-knowledge and knowledge of God (Theunissen, *Hegels Lehre vom absoluten Geist als theologisch-politischer Traktat* [Berlin: de Gruyter, 1970], pp. 223), although it is important to note that Theunissen’s engagement is with the *Encyclopaedia* (the sections on absolute spirit), rather than with the final chapter of the *Phenomenology*. My own emphasis on overcoming false oppositions is derived to a significant extent from Theunissen’s discussion of whether spirit is subjective or objective (see Theunissen, *Hegels Lehre*, p. 103ff.). H.S. Harris offers a meticulous working through of the text, as one would expect from his compendious *Hegel’s Ladder*, and he includes commentary on most of the secondary literature up to the time of its writing (1997). There was also a lively exchange in the late 1980s and 1990s on this final chapter in the journal *Owl of Minerva*, in which the major participants are Stephen Houlgate, Joseph Flay, Simon Lumsden, Rob Devos, Walter Ludwig, and Robert Williams, and which concerns what kind of metaphysics is displayed in “Absolute Knowing.” A useful review and the relevant references can be found in a late contribution by Stephen Houlgate: see Houlgate, “Absolute Knowing Revisited,” *The Owl of Minerva*, 30/1 (1998), pp. 51–67. I am strongly influenced by Houlgate’s textually attentive arguments. See also Bernard Rousset, *Le Savoir Absolu* (Paris: Aubier Montaigne, 1998), which Harris dismisses as not very useful, but on which Brito draws significantly in his account of absolute knowing: see Brito, *La Christologie* pp. 167ff.; Brito admits that absolute knowing does not play a significant role in his account: p. 171. See also Gabriella Baptist, “Das absolute Wissen. Zeit, Geschichte, Wissenschaft,” in D. Köhler and O. Pöggeler (eds.), *G.W.F. Hegel: Phänomenologie des Geistes* (Berlin: Akademie, 2006); Klaus Vieweg, “Religion und absolutes Wissen. Der Übergang von der Vorstellung zum Begriff” and Hans Fulda, “Das erscheinende absolute Wissen,” both in K. Vieweg and W. Welsch (eds.), *Hegels Phänomenologie des Geistes: Ein kooperativer Kommentar zu einem Schlüsselwerk der Moderne* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2008); Allegra de Laurentiis, “Absolute Knowing,” in Kenneth Westphal (ed.), *The Blackwell Guide to Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), pp. 246–264.

The Text

The spirit of revealed religion has not yet overcome its consciousness as such, or, what amounts to the same thing, its actual self-consciousness is not the object of its consciousness. Spirit itself and the moments distinguished within it generally belong to representation and to the form of objectivity. (§788)

Der Geist der offenbaren Religion hat sein Bewußtsein als solches noch nicht überwunden, oder, was dasselbe ist, sein wirkliches Selbstbewußtsein ist nicht der Gegenstand seines Bewußtseins; er selbst überhaupt und die in ihm sich unterscheidenden Momente fallen in das Vorstellen und in die Form der Gegenständlichkeit. (*PhG* 422)

The chapter opens with a reference to the previous chapter on religion. The opening observation identifies a certain inadequacy displayed in the spirit of revealed religion. This is marked by the relation of “consciousness” to “self-consciousness,” a relation summarized by the term “representation” (*Vorstellung*). The task which Hegel outlines is that of “overcoming consciousness.” It should be borne in mind that the *Phenomenology* is structured into three broad sections: “Consciousness,” “Self-Consciousness” and “Reason.” Overcoming consciousness means making the transition from one “shape” to another. “Consciousness,” for Hegel, signals an approach in which the object is treated as “over and against” the subject. In terms of the different kinds of logic considered earlier in this chapter, it is an approach guided by a logic of opposition, rather than a logic of distinction in inseparable relation.

To say “the spirit of revealed religion has not yet overcome its consciousness as such” is to say in part that religious thought is to an extent guided by a logic of opposition. Religion nonetheless marks a very advanced stage towards a logic of distinction in inseparable relation. The *Phenomenology* is, Hegel tells us early on, the “science of the experience of consciousness” (*Wissenschaft der Erfahrung des Bewußtseins*), §88. The obvious question to ask is, “whose experience?” The answer to this is “human experience,” rather than “experience in general” and certainly not “divine experience.” Hegel shows no interest in the question of what, if anything, God might experience. Hegel consistently describes experiencing as a creaturely activity. The experience of the religious community is the experience of spirit.

Spirit is glossed in the “Self-Consciousness” section as “I that is we, and we that is I” (*Ich, das Wir, und Wir, das Ich ist*), §177. If read as ontology, this looks confused, or at least odd. If read as a logical claim, however, it is rather less strange. A logic of opposition pits “I” against “we,” or as we might say, it opposes the individual to the community. A logic of distinction in inseparable relation, however, preserves the distinction

between individuals but understands what it is to be an individual in terms of its relations to the community. There are many “individuals” who are united into one “community.” To speak of individuals is to speak of those who are related not only to other individuals, but to the community in which all are related. To speak of community is to speak neither of an aggregate of individuals, nor of a single entity that absorbs all individuality into itself, but of a unity in which distinctions between individuals are retained, but in a way such that to do justice to an individual requires doing justice to its relations to other individuals and to the community. The term “spirit” (*Geist*) is Hegel’s noun for expressing a non-oppositional logic that guides one’s thinking about individuals and community, and it complements the noun “concept” (*Begriff*), which expresses a non-oppositional logic that guides thinking about subject and object, or thinking and being.

In religion, spirit is present in the very language of the community, and it performs the role in which the community’s consciousness and agency are presented to that same community. But although it is guided by a logic in which the false opposition between “I” and “we” is overcome, it is also guided by a logic in which the false opposition between “subject” and “object” remains. It embodies “spirit” but not “concept.” It is thus guided by (at least two) different logics. Hegel’s way of conceiving this is to notice that in religion, spirit is not conscious of itself as spirit; rather, the community is conscious of spirit which it views as something other than itself. This is what is meant by the phrase “the form of objectivity” at the end of the sentence. Hegel’s word for the community’s viewing of its own agency as something other than itself is “representation” (*Vorstellung*). To represent is to picture the object as over and against the subject. This is a quite normal way of thinking. Indeed it is how most people think most (and perhaps all) of the time.

In religion, then, one sees a logic of spirit. This is a logic in which the false opposition between individual and community is overcome. One also sees a logic of representation. This is a logic in which the false opposition between subject and object persists. The task set in this first sentence of “Absolute Knowing” is the task of identifying a logic of spirit combined with a logic of the concept, where “concept” signifies a relation of subject to object where each is distinct but inseparably in relation to the other.

The *content* of representing is absolute spirit, and the sole remaining issue is that of sublating this mere form, or, rather, because the form belongs to *consciousness as such*, its truth must have already resulted from the shapes consciousness has assumed. (§788)

Der Inhalt des Vorstellens ist der absolute Geist; und es ist allein noch um das Aufheben dieser bloßen Form zu tun, oder vielmehr weil sie dem *Bewußtsein als solchem* angehört, muß ihre Wahrheit schon in den Gestaltungen desselben sich ergeben haben. (*PhG* 422)

Hegel here introduces the relation of form and content. Religious thought is guided by a logic of representation. This means that even if it has “true” content, its form preserves a false opposition between subject and object. Its content is, in fact, true: it is “absolute spirit,” which we already know signifies the relation between individual and community. Representational thinking grasps the truth, but presents the truth in a way, a form, that needs to be sublated.

The word “sublate” is an odd word that is not in common currency in English today. It translates the word *aufheben*, which is a common word in German. It means to cancel or abolish, on the one hand; it also means to preserve or retain. This is one of those words, like the English word “cleave,” which does not merely have different meanings but meanings that are contrary. The English word “sublate” was used by Hegel’s nineteenth-century Scottish translators, and the word has stuck. It is now customary to lament the need to use the word sublate and to explain the nuances of *aufheben*, a custom which I follow here. Were one trying to find a suitable alternative, one might use something like “suspend.”

It is evident why Hegel wishes to speak of “sublating” form. The form needs to be abolished, in so far as it falsely opposes subject to object, and needs to be preserved, in so far as *this* form genuinely displays spirit.

Truth is one of the most interesting and evocative words in the *Phenomenology*. I think it is certainly the most important, and for sophisticated readers who wonder whether there is any mileage these days in talking about truth, Hegel’s text will either be one more specimen of brilliant failure or a timely opportunity to rethink all the nonsense that postmodern philosophy has to offer on the subject of truth. Theologically minded readers have limited room for maneuver, because John’s Gospel is not just canonical but structurally central to theology, and its primary concern is Jesus Christ as way, truth, and life. Any theology which experiments with indifference towards these concerns is experimenting with not being theology. Hegel’s thinking is utterly Johannine – a claim that does not need to be supported by evidence immediately: it is enough to read the *Phenomenology*, the *Science of Logic*, or the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*; this study reads parts of all three. Hegel is undoubtedly interested in truth. But, just as Pilate asked Jesus, “What is truth?” and did not receive an answer (or at least did not invite one), Hegel does not tell us in this paragraph. Hegel’s most explicit remarks are in the Preface to the *Phenomenology*, and indeed in the first few pages. We can be brief. For Hegel, *truth is in motion*. Hegel’s conception of the task of philosophy is dynamic. We might fill out this brief statement by noticing the ways in which Hegel is an Aristotelian thinker, and that the dynamism of Aristotle’s philosophy marks his own. Hegel notes in the Preface that a common-sense approach to truth simply opposes truth to falsity. One encounters a claim and one asks, “True or False?”. It is guided by what

I here call Manichean logic. But in philosophy, especially Hegel's kind of philosophy that is attentive to history, one notices that conceptions of truth change, and a logic of opposition is unable to account for that change. One needs a logic of relation, that also displays attentiveness to history. Hegel famously uses the example of a living organism (thus displaying the relation, in his thinking, between truth and life, which one would expect in a Johannine pattern of reasoning, and which Hegel also inherits from Leibniz). To grasp this we cannot be brief, but must attend to Hegel's whole claim:

The bud disappears when the blossom breaks through, and one might say that the former is refuted by the latter. Likewise, by virtue of the fruit, the blossom itself may be declared to be a false existence of the plant, since the fruit emerges as the blossom's truth as it comes to replace the blossom itself. These forms are not merely distinguished from each other, but, as incompatible with each other, they also supplant each other. However, at the same time their fluid nature makes them into moments of an organic unity within which they not only do not conflict with each other. Rather, one is equally as necessary as the other, and it is this equal necessity which alone constitutes the life of the whole. However, in part, contradiction with regard to a philosophical system does not usually comprehend itself in this way, and, in part, the consciousness which apprehends the contradiction generally neither knows how to free the contradiction from its one-sidedness, nor how to sustain it as free-standing. Nor does it take cognizance of its moments which appear to be conflicting and incompatible, but are reciprocally necessary. (§2)

Die Knospe verschwindet in dem Hervorbrechen der Blüte, und man könnte sagen, daß jene von dieser widerlegt wird, ebenso wird durch die Frucht die Blüte für ein falsches Dasein der Pflanze erklärt, und als ihre Wahrheit tritt jene an die Stelle von dieser. Diese Formen unterscheiden sich nicht nur, sondern verdrängen sich auch als unverträglich miteinander. Aber ihre flüssige Natur macht sie zugleich zu Momenten der organischen Einheit, worin sie sich nicht nur nicht widerstreiten, sondern eins so notwendig als das andere ist, und diese gleiche Notwendigkeit macht erst das Leben des Ganzen aus. Aber der Widerspruch gegen ein philosophisches System pflegt teils sich selbst nicht auf diese Weise zu begreifen, teils auch weiß das auffassende Bewußtsein gemeinhin nicht, ihn von seiner Einseitigkeit zu befreien oder frei zu erhalten, und in der Gestalt des streitend und sich zuwider Scheinenden gegenseitig notwendige Momente zu erkennen. (*PhG* 10)

We can notice the verbs: disappears, breaks through, emerges, replaces, supplant, conflict, etc. And then notice some adjectives: distinguished, incompatible, fluid, organic, conflicting, necessary. And finally some nouns: unity, contradiction, life, one-sidedness, moments.¹¹ The analogy of the plant is not incidental: it is how Hegel chooses to negotiate these verbs, adjectives, and nouns, or – to use more formal terms – is how Hegel handles questions of logic, predication, and ontology in relation to truth. Common-sense logic (which is also the logic which guides natural science) poses alternatives: true or false, x or y? But if truth is in motion, if it is organic, if it is produced and not just brutally given, then one is dealing with things analogous to buds, blossoms, and fruits. Truth, in a different account of this kind, is something in which one discerns shapes, moments, and – in a word – *life*. In John's Gospel, Jesus says "I am the way and the truth and the life" (John 14:6). This is a pretty good guide to making sense of truth in Hegel. To discover what Hegel has to say about truth, one should attend to what he has to say about "ways" (*Weisen*, usually translated "modes") and "life": these terms pervade the *Phenomenology*. If truth is organic, then just as one does not ask "bud or blossom?" or "blossom or fruit?", so one does not oppose different shapes or moments in the history of human inquiries into truth. The task is to discern how shapes displace each other in ways that new shapes preserve some relation to the old, through a relation of loss and gain, and that is the task Hegel discharges in the *Phenomenology*.

The reader who approaches Hegel's account of truth via common-sense logic (a logic of opposition) will thus suppose that Hegel is not really interested in truth at all. Such a supposition will rest on the ideas that truth is (a) static and (b) a matter of oppositions. Truth for Hegel is (a') dynamic and (b') a matter of relations. It is open to his reader to dismiss this account of truth, but this will entail dismissing Aristotle's dynamism and Patristic relationalism too. Hegel would go further and say that it entails denying the doctrine of the Trinity, which is the classical topos *par excellence* of a display of a logic of distinction in inseparable relation. Hegel may not merely be right about this. It is probable that the only reason Hegel can imagine (and thus say) this at all is because he inherits Christian reflection on the Trinity. The logic of relations is not Hegel's invention, which he then reads into the prior tradition. It is the tradition's invention, a tradition of which Hegel is part, and which he reads against certain trends in modern philosophy.

We now have at least the contours of truth as it appears in the *Phenomenology*, and we can return to its appearance more specifically at the start of "Absolute Knowing": "its truth must have already resulted from

¹¹ Pinkard's translation of this crucial passage, in its attempts to produce fluent and readable English, transforms many of the verbs and adjectives into nouns. My emendation of his translation, in its attempt to highlight the motion displayed, has sacrificed readability for "verbality."

the shapes consciousness has assumed.” Truth is in motion, and the truth of “representing” is a product or result, which one can discern in the shapes of consciousness surveyed in the chapters that lead up to the chapter on “Religion.”

The overcoming of the object of consciousness is not to be taken one-sidedly, that is, as showing that the object is returning into the self. Rather, it is to be taken more determinately, namely, that the object as such was exhibited to consciousness to be as much in the act of vanishing as, to a greater degree, the self-emptying of self-consciousness turned out to be what posits thinghood. This self-emptying has not only a negative meaning but a positive one as well, and not only for us, that is, in itself, but also for self-consciousness itself. (§788)

Diese Überwindung des Gegenstandes des Bewußtseins ist nicht als das einseitige zu nehmen, daß er sich als in das Selbst zurückkehrend zeigte, sondern bestimmter so, daß er sowohl als solcher sich ihm als verschwindend darstellte, als noch vielmehr, daß die Entäußerung des Selbstbewußtseins es ist, welche die Dingheit setzt, und daß diese Entäußerung nicht nur negative, sondern positive Bedeutung, sie nicht nur für uns oder an sich, sondern für es selbst hat. (*PhG* 422)

This is compressed. The phrase “the overcoming of the object” is already compressed, before one gets to the rest of the sentence. Hegel is making a logical claim: if one treats the relation between subject and object according to a Chalcedonian rather than Manichean logic, then subject and object are not opposed to each other, and any talk of the subject will entail talk of its relation to objects, and any talk of the object will entail talk of its relation to subjects. To insist, as Hegel does, that talk of the object is inseparable from talk about the subject who does that talking, means that “the object” is “overcome.” It is no longer just “the object” – a complex relation is in view. It would be a significant and hard-won insight to say that “the object returns into the self.” This indeed is the insight of Kantian philosophy, in Hegel’s view, where for the first time in modern philosophy there is a turn to the subject in order to do justice to the object (as opposed merely to a turn to the subject, as in Descartes). But Hegel says that this is one-sided.

It is vital to note at this juncture that when Hegel says something is one-sided, he is emphatically not saying that it is wrong or false. It is right and true. . . . to an extent. Hegel considers the turn to the subject to be a genuine advance in philosophy, because it rightly focuses attention not only on the object, but on the one who attends to the object. In Kantian terms, the

conditions for objectivity are as subjective (in concepts) as they are objective (in sensible intuition). So far so good. But it is one-sided, for Hegel, because for the object to “return into the self,” one does not have a relation between subject and object, one has a reduction to the subject alone. The subject wins, so to speak. This is a feature of Kant’s philosophy, and it becomes much more explicit in Fichte’s *Wissenschaftslehre*.

At this juncture, we might pause to note a lesson that Hegel offers to theology, and to contemporary theology in particular. We can call this the lesson of one-sidedness. It is very common to encounter in contemporary theology a supremely negative assessment of Kant’s philosophy. This assessment is motivated by Kant’s invention of “things in themselves,” and the corresponding insistence that we know things as they appear but not as they are in themselves. Our involvement in creation seems hopelessly compromised by this move. If Kant’s distinction between appearances and things in themselves is best interpreted as isolating us from the world, this is indeed a problem.¹² Combined with Kant’s explicit insistence that God is an idea of reason, and thus not knowable (because we can only *know* the fruits of judgment, that is, the combining of concepts and sensible intuition), prospects for a positive theological assessment of Kant’s philosophy look poor: it seems we are cut off not only from knowledge of God, but from knowledge of creation. God is an idea of reason; things in themselves are unknowable. This is a bleak picture indeed. This may not be the right way to interpret Kant’s claims, but it is Hegel’s way. Yet Hegel does not offer a merely negative assessment. He takes Kant’s account to be one-sided. That is, Kant’s account is not to be rejected. It is to be repaired. To do that, which is what the *Phenomenology* and the *Science of Logic* attempt, it is necessary to articulate the ways in which Kant’s philosophy itself repairs problems in prior thinking: a positive account is needed. A diagnosis of one-sidedness produces different tasks from a diagnosis of mere error. A diagnosis of one-sidedness generates practices of repair, rather than practices of rejection. Contemporary theology needs to repair, but currently often tends to reject, much modern philosophy. That will doubtless include the repair of Hegel’s philosophy, and not only that of Kant.

“The object of consciousness” at the head of this sentence looks rather innocuous. It could refer to any object and, in terms of logic, one can substitute anything for “the object” here. But in terms of Hegel’s narrative, the object is not a general object, but the object that appeared in the previous chapter on “Religion.” It is God. This sentence thus needs to be interpreted as an analysis of what is going on in religious talk about God, where God is an object for consciousness. In other words, the idea of the object “returning

¹² This is one possible interpretation. A quite different assessment is offered in Allison, *Kant’s Transcendental Idealism*.

into the self” is not just a failure to deal adequately with the objectivity of the object. It would be a way of talking about God that reduces the divine to the human. Hegel rules this out, but also suggests that this is what happens in Kantian philosophy. Talk of God as an idea of reason “locates” God in a deeply problematic way, for Hegel. This might draw immediate applause from theologically minded readers, were it not for the basic move in Hegel’s claim, which is that God, as an object of consciousness, is indeed to be “overcome,” but in the right way. Can there be a “right way” of overcoming God as an object of consciousness?

This goes to the heart of the *Phenomenology*, and to Hegel’s logic of relations between subject and object. In religious life, God is an object for consciousness. Hegel has come at this from a variety of angles in the previous chapter. God is “pictured” or “represented” as an object over and against the subject. In religious life one seeks contact with God because God is other than the subject. This is most obvious in practices of prayer. God is addressed as an other. But Hegel discerns contrary tendencies in religious practice, including practices of speech. God is cast as an object for consciousness at certain moments. But God is also the one “in” whom we live. The strong “objective” tendency is accompanied by a strong “participative” tendency. Christian language of the spirit is the topos where this tendency is most intense, and that is why Hegel casts his whole investigation as a phenomenology of *spirit*, rather than of truth or of language or of anything else. Hegel’s task is to draw out the philosophical significance of these contrary tendencies. He does so through the construction of different logics. Speech about God as an object of consciousness displays a logic of opposition: God over and against creation. Speech about God as indwelling spirit (in Johannine language), as the “giver of life” (as the Nicene Creed has it), displays a logic of distinction in inseparable relation. In the one case divine action is utterly separate from human action; in the other case divine and human action are inextricably in relation, and to describe the one is to refer simultaneously to the other.

This logic of relations does not commit Hegel to the view that God necessarily creates (although he may well hold that view). It just commits him to the view that human speech about God will have simultaneously to refer to God’s relation to creation.

If one asks an ontological question, such as “is God truly *other* for Hegel?” then the text becomes rather opaque. This is because the language is all about relations – about logic – rather than ontology. One gets more lucid results if one asks a logical question, such as “how is divine action related to human action, for Hegel?”. Hegel offers an answer to that question in this chapter, and indeed in the small portion with which we are currently concerned. If that relation is governed by a logic of opposition, which is what “object of consciousness” implies, then (to put it rather crudely)

God and humanity will go about their separate business, with occasional “religious” attempts to connect them, attempts that will fail because the attempts are themselves governed by a logic of opposition. If that relation is governed by a logic of distinctness in inseparable relation, which is what “the overcoming of the object of consciousness” implies, then divine and human action will display the kind of participation that is described in John’s Gospel, where one is led into “all truth,” where one receives the gift of the “indwelling spirit” and so on. This logic preserves “distinction” and acknowledges “relation.” One-sided approaches either have too much distinction (God as an object opposed to the subject) or too much relation (God as a mere epiphenomenon of human thinking). Religious thought, for Hegel, displays too much distinction. Certain kinds of rationalism display too much relation. But religious thought is by far the superior one-sidedness, because it displays contrary tendencies. The language of participation in God’s life, after all, is not imposed on religion by Hegel. That very language comes from the tradition. The problem is that the dominant logics which guide theological reflection on that language are logics of opposition, and this causes the tradition to undermine its own most generative possibilities for speech about God. The tradition has its own peculiar logic – which I have glossed as “Chalcedonian logic” – but this ceases to be available when the dominant patterns of reasoning are Cartesian or Kantian “Manichean” logic. Hegel’s project is – in my interpretation – an attempt to render Chalcedonian logic available once again.

The next clause, rendered by Pinkard as a separate sentence, cannot be easily broken up:

Rather, it is to be taken more determinately, namely, that the object as such was exhibited to consciousness to be as much in the act of vanishing as, to a greater degree, the self-emptying of self-consciousness turned out to be what posits thinghood.

This kind of claim causes headaches for Hegel’s readers because if one pores over each clause or part-clause, and tries to make sense of it in isolation, it just refuses to yield its treasure. It has to be taken whole. That is what we shall do. “Consciousness” is the vanishing of the object just as “thinghood” is the self-emptying of self-consciousness. There are too many terms for comfort in play here. We can resolve some of them, in an algebraic sense, by noting the alignment of “object” and “thinghood,” “consciousness” and “self-consciousness,” and “vanishing” and “self-emptying.” Let us reduce these alternative terms to univocal ones, for heuristic purposes. Let us call these “objectivity,” “subjectivity,” and “renunciation.” We get this:

Objectivity’s renunciation is a condition for subjectivity; subjectivity’s renunciation is a condition for objectivity.

Renunciation sounds a bit “religious.” This is no surprise. Hegel’s word for “self-emptying” is *Entäußerung*, which has distinctive theological connotations in Hegel’s period. We should show some interest in the Greek word *ekenosen* in Philippians 2:7, from which we get the theological term “kenosis.” In the version of the *Lutherbibel* in use in 1807, the translation of *ekenosen* is *entäußern*. The familiar King James translation of this passage is “But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men,” or in the RSV “but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.” It is this word for “self-emptying” (RSV) that Hegel is echoing.

The word *entäußern* does not actually appear in any of Luther’s original translations, incidentally. Luther’s so-called “final hand” (*letzter Hand*) of 1545 of Philippians 2:7 is “Sondern eussert sich selbs / vnd nam Knechts gestalt an / ward gleich wie ein ander Mensch / vnd an geberden als ein Mensch erfunden.” But by Hegel’s time the translation had been amended. The currently used 1912 version of the *Lutherbibel*, for example, has this for Philippians 2:7: “sondern entäußerte sich selbst und nahm Knechtsgestalt an, ward gleich wie ein anderer Mensch und an Gebärden als ein Mensch erfunden.”

This is not just a discussion which shows some of the challenges for Hegel’s translators. It also displays Hegel’s “Philippian” logic, where the relation of two terms (here “divinity” and “humanity”) is governed by a relation of self-emptying rather than opposition. The “form” or “shape” (Gk *morphe*) of divinity, in Christ, is displayed in “self-emptying” (Gk *ekenosen*). We might say that the condition for the appearing of divinity is its self-emptying. Hegel has this kind of logic in mind in his discussion of the relation of objectivity and subjectivity. Objectivity’s “self-emptying” is a condition of its appearing for subjectivity; and subjectivity’s “self-emptying” is a condition for it genuinely attending to the objectivity of objects. We can even render Hegel’s insight in explicitly Philippian terms:

Subjectivity is a product of objectivity’s kenosis, just as objectivity is achieved through subjectivity’s kenosis.

This sounds rather strange, but it is only as strange as the theology of Philippians 2:7. What Hegel brings into the frame that is not there in Philippians is the reciprocity of two kinds of kenosis, together with a “Chalcedonian” logic which governs the “Philippian” logic. The Philippian move by itself could be interpreted as a claim that Christ “gave up” divinity and “took on” humanity. Hegel does not follow that line of thinking, however. It is the *relation* between divinity and humanity that interests Hegel, not some supposed *choice* between them (a choice that allegedly faced Christ then, or which allegedly faces the reader now). For Hegel, there is no opposition, “divine”

versus “human,” and correspondingly no one-sidedness (as one finds in Arian heresy, for example) in which Christ is *only* human. In Philippians the relation between divinity and humanity is preserved, but preserved through an act of self-emptying, in which divinity “appears” as the self-emptying of divinity and the taking-on of humanity. Put differently, taking on humanity is an appearance of divinity, not the denial of divinity. But for this clarification to be made, one needs a logic that governs distinction in inseparable relation, and not simply a logic of self-emptying. One needs Chalcedon if one is to give a good account of Philippians, one might say. Again, it is probably not the case that Hegel conceives a logic of self-emptying to govern the relation between subject and object, and then finds by happy coincidence that this logic can be described in terms found in Philippians 2. It is because such a logic is there in Philippians 2 that Hegel can conceive of it. This is surely what belonging to a tradition means. More interestingly, it seems that when Hegel seeks to repair the errant logics of common sense, which are intensified in certain Cartesian oppositions between subject and object, or between being and thinking, the alternative logics he produces are learned from scripture and from doctrine.

Self-emptying is rendered by some translators (and some of the best commentators) as “externalization” or “objectification.”¹³ This is a good way to get at part of the meaning of *Entäußerung*, namely the claims Hegel makes about the relation between the self and the world. Hegel is fascinated and appalled by the problems bequeathed by Descartes, in which the thinking subject is imprisoned in interiority, and has no persuasively describable path into the world. Epistemologically, the subject has no access to the world, but this is surely the least of its problems. It is more significant that it is not really in the world at all. Hegel desires an account of being in the world, including knowing the world. His chosen word to describe the subject’s being in the world is *Entäußerung*. The self gives itself up in order to take on worldness, we might awkwardly say. This is a recognizably Christian idiom. It is reminiscent of baptism liturgies, in which the candidate is reborn; it recalls the death and resurrection of Christ; it is reminiscent of the Gospels where, in Matthew 16:25, Luke 9:24, and Luke 17:33, the disciples are told that the one who loses his life for Christ’s sake will find, or save, or keep it. Its meaning for Hegel is that the self gains outwardness by losing inwardness. To draw on the Philippians idiom, the self does not treat its full realization as something to be grasped and held onto, but as something that comes about when it renounces a whole-hearted (and indeed hard-hearted) self-regard,

¹³ See, for example, Allegra de Laurentiis’ interpretation of “absolute knowing”: de Laurentiis, “Absolute Knowing,” *passim*.

and in allowing itself to be given away, it receives itself back – but now in the world, and not only in its own interior being.

There is a limit to how useful these abstract descriptions are. A couple of analogies may help. At a certain point in one's life, one may be asked to take on official roles with institutional responsibilities. The actions at the heart of these roles are not related to one's self, but are aspects of the role. One's personal opinion or feelings are secondary, and even one's judgment is severely constrained by institutional habits or legal protocols. This loss of self is inscribed in the titles one assumes – sergeant, president, doctor, right honorable member, and so forth. One often loses one's name. What is gained is one's more solid presence in the institution, or a more external dimension to one's being in the world: both are products of a more emphatic recognition by others. The subject who has this externality is the same subject that empties itself, yet it is also different – changed – because it has taken on a role, and is encountered by others in that role and as that office-holder. A second analogy might be marriage. It is hard to imagine a more intense experience of self-emptying and externalization. A certain kind of interiority is given up and a certain empty freedom is exchanged for responsibility for another's flourishing and for new capacities (often legally recognized) for joint decisions and shared agency. It is possible to get married and refuse such *Entäußerung*, in Hegel's sense, but this is just a narcissists' pact, a Cartesian coalition, a Hollywood wedding. Both cases – taking on office, getting married – exhibit the relation between self-emptying and "objective" return that Hegel seeks to articulate in his account.

We can return to our account of the overcoming of the object of consciousness. Subjectivity and objectivity are related to each other not by a logic of opposition, but by a logic of distinctness in inseparable relation. Moreover, they are related to each other not by a logic of reduction, one to the other, but by a logic of self-emptying, where the renunciation of *x* is the condition for *x* to appear to *y*, and the renunciation of *y* is the condition for *x* to appear to *y* truly as *x*. (The object's renunciation of objectivity is necessary for the object to appear; the subject's renunciation of subjectivity is necessary for the object to appear truly as an object and not as a mere fantasy of the subject.) It is because of the operations of these alternative logics that Hegel can say that self-emptying is not just something negative (it is not just the renunciation of *x*) but also positive (it is the condition for the appearing of *x*). This positive dimension is not only a benefit for us, as subjects (because we have objects appearing to us), but it is also positive for subjectivity (we are more truly subjects if what appear really are objects rather than just our own confections). In more twentieth-century language, kenosis means objects can appear to subjects, and it also means that subjectivity is not narcissistic: it really has to do with objects. The last clause

of the sentence is not a result of the previous reasoning: it anticipates and advertises the reasoning which follows:

For self-consciousness, the negative of the object, that is, its self-sublation, has as a result a positive meaning. On the one hand, self-consciousness *knows* this nullity of the object to be the result of self-consciousness emptying itself of itself – for in this self-emptying, it posits itself as object, that is, on account of the inseparable unity of being-for-itself, it posits the object as itself. On the other hand, there is at the same time thereby this other moment, namely, that self-consciousness has in the same way also sublated this self-emptying and this objectivity, and it has taken them back into itself; thus in its otherness as such, it is at one with itself. (§788)

Für es hat das Negative des Gegenstandes oder dessen Sich-selbst-aufheben dadurch die positive Bedeutung, oder es *weiß* diese Nichtigkeit desselben dadurch einerseits, daß es sich selbst entäußert, – denn in dieser Entäußerung setzt es sich als Gegenstand, oder den Gegenstand um der untrennbaren Einheit des Für-sich-seins willen als sich selbst. Andererseits liegt hierin zugleich dieses andre Moment, daß es diese Entäußerung und Gegenständigkeit ebensosehr auch aufgehoben und in sich zurückgenommen hat, also in seinem Anderssein als solchem bei sich ist. (*PhG* 422)

There is a vital difference, for Hegel, between consciousness and self-consciousness. Consciousness is a relation between subject and object, where the subject is oriented to an object. Self-consciousness is a relation between subject and object, where the subject is oriented to itself as an object, even when it is contemplating another object. The condition for the subject to appear to itself as an object is the subject's self-emptying. We might say that it has to "lose" something of its subjectivity if it is to "gain" something of its own objectivity. How does this work? In this sentence, Hegel is concerned at a deep level with the unity of subjectivity and objectivity. "Unity" is not a helpful word for interpreters of Hegel, because it can be taken to imply that where there were two, now there is one. Hegel does not quite mean this when he talks of unity. He means that where there were two in opposition, now there are two that are distinct but in inseparable relation, and that the inseparable relation produces a "one." Adapting Trinitarian language, when Hegel says "unity" he really means "bi-unity." There is no such term readily to hand, and as Hegel tends not to fashion neologisms, he adapts "unity" for his purposes. Hegel is concerned *at a deep level* with unity in that he does not retain any vestige of the opposition between subject and object.

In my interpretation thus far, these vestiges abound, in so far as the subject that appears to itself as an object is separable from the object that appears to the subject. For Hegel this is not so, and he now makes this explicit.

The unity of subject and object ("unity" being understood as a product of Chalcedonian logic) is deep. What makes subjectivity subjective is its concern with the object, and what makes objectivity objective is the activity of subjects. Hegel has a very counter-intuitive formulation for this: "it posits itself as object, that is . . . it posits the object as itself." This reversibility of formulations is a favorite device of Hegel's. What does it mean? At a deep level it means that the subject can only be an object to itself in the course of orienting itself to objects other than itself. There is, for Hegel, no direct "presence to self." There is, however, presence to self of a kind, but it is produced through orientation to objects; it is mediated. Put differently, the self knows itself through its knowing of the other, supremely in its knowing of God. But if this formulation is to be adopted, one has to acknowledge that the relation between self and other is governed by distinctness in inseparable relation, not by opposition.

This is all rather abstract. Either that or mysteriously pious, if the suggestion is that the subject can only know itself by knowing God.¹⁴ We can ground it a little, through the example of marriage again. The experience of marriage can be not only surprising but rather disturbing for some people. Some single persons have a certain idea of who they are, and this idea is sustained in various ways in the midst of social life. Others may or may not reflect this idea back, but by being not very attentive to others' agency, some persons can persist with their idea of themselves, which may be rather flattering, or self-hating, or whatever. Then they get married. And this idea of themselves comes under assault from a surprising quarter. It is not what one's spouse says. He or she may say, "you take yourself to be x, but you are actually rather y," and one may or may not take it seriously. Casual acquaintances may have said as much before: one's spouse is just as mistaken as they. No, it is the unwelcome voyage of self-discovery that is initiated by loving another person. To care for one's spouse is to be free no longer to turn away from the consequences of one's agency. Paradoxically, so long as one does not care for one's spouse, everything goes swimmingly, or at least appears to (although for some inexplicable reason one's spouse is going insane or becoming depressed or violent: therapy is needed!). But as soon as one practices love, one confronts the "truth" of one's actions. Through one's care for one's spouse, one confronts (and is not merely confronted by) one's action. Action towards the other reveals the self to the self. In Hegel's slightly strained formulation, "it posits the object as itself." In rather more relaxed

¹⁴ This suggestion is taken up by Lauer: "Man must be made conscious that he is not . . . completely human . . . in isolation from God" (Lauer, *A Reading*, p. 300).

language, one finds that one is not merely looking at the other any more, but looking at the self too. The other has not ceased to be other in this, and the self has not ceased to look at the other. But something about the self has obtruded – has become *self*-conscious – in this consciousness of the other. This is not uniformly good news. It can be most unpleasant to discover who one is, especially if this discovery comes about because one loves another. It can be very painful for one of the fruits of love to be the truth. Paradoxically, this only happens – or happens most intensely – because one genuinely loves. Surely it is a splendid thing to love. The truth is surely that I love! Yes indeed. But it is not the whole truth. The truth is also that I am not entirely who I took myself to be, and am now strange to myself. There is a relation to the other of which I am conscious, and because this relation is between *self* and other, knowledge of the relation discloses something about the self – and what it discloses may not bear a comforting resemblance to previous conceptions of that self. Love for the other has led to truth about the self. One “sees” the other, in one sense, and “sees” who one really is, in another.

This analogy of love may help to explain what Hegel means by “it posits itself as object . . . it posits the object as itself.” But Hegel does not stop there. He rarely does. Not only does self-consciousness know that it empties itself, with the result that it recognizes the role of its own subjectivity in the production of objectivity (and this can appear as the “nullity” of the object – because the object is not just over-and-against the subject, but is bound up with the subject, and thus “not” the kind of “object” that an object was supposed to be). Also, self-consciousness does not rest with the insight that the object is not quite the “object” that it was supposed to be. It also recognizes that it really does have to do with objects, rather than a merely narcissistic self-relation. After all, a merely narcissistic self-relation would not really have to do with objects, whereas the kind of self-relation in play here is precisely the product of having to do with objects. Hegel thus goes on:

This is the movement of consciousness, and within that movement, consciousness is the totality of its moments. – Consciousness must likewise conduct itself towards the object in terms of the totality of its determinations and have come to grips with the object in terms of each of those determinations. This totality of its determinations makes the *object in itself* into a spiritual

Dies ist die Bewegung des Bewußtseins, und dieses ist darin die Totalität seiner Momente. – Es muß sich ebenso zu dem Gegenstande nach der Totalität seiner Bestimmungen verhalten, und ihn nach jeder derselben so erfaßt haben. Diese Totalität seiner Bestimmungen macht *ihn an sich* zum geistigen Wesen, und für das Bewußtsein wird er dies in Wahrheit durch das Auffassen einer jeden einzelnen

essence, and for consciousness, it becomes this in truth through the act of apprehending each of its individual determinations as a determination of the self, that is, through the spiritual conduct mentioned above. (§788)

derselben, als des Selbsts, oder durch das obengenannte geistige Verhalten zu ihnen. (*PhG* 422)

Movement (or motion, *Bewegung*) is central to Hegel's account of the various topics that appear in the *Phenomenology*. Hegel draws on a long tradition of reflection on motion, and on the way in which reflection on a rich conception of motion draws together otherwise disparate fields of human inquiry. It is quite unlike the newer Newtonian tradition in which motion is bound up with a somewhat flattened universe of cause and effect. But Hegel's philosophy displays contrary tendencies. As well as motion, there is "totality," and it is crucial to appreciate the role that this plays. Motion is a temporal kind of thing: it contains "then" and "now," "there" and "here." In the ancient Greek tradition on which Hegel explicitly draws, it is the realm not only of "being" and of "nothing" but of "becoming." The succession of moments to which Hegel refers is a series, in time. By contrast, totality is an atemporal kind of thing: it gathers together time and space and generates a field saturated with events that neither move nor are at rest. Totality is complete simultaneity. Consciousness is both temporal and atemporal in Hegel's account at this point. On the one hand it is movement, and this "is" is a succession of moments in time. These moments refer to self-emptying and the sublation of self-emptying, in which objectivity and subjectivity are related so as to produce self-consciousness. On the other hand consciousness is the totality of its moments, and this "is" is simultaneity. There is then a second totality in view: the totality of the object's determinations (taking the possessive *seiner Bestimmungen* to refer to *Gegenstand*). Consciousness, which is the totality of its moments, is oriented to the object, which is the totality of its determinations. Hegel then qualifies this orientation towards the object. It is oriented *both* to the totality of the object's determinations *and* to each of those determinations. In other words, totality does not swallow up particularity here: they are held together in consciousness' orientation to the object. The relation between "totality" and "each" is then developed in terms of spirit. The object is a being *in itself* of which spirit can be predicated, by virtue of the totality of its determinations. Language about spirit is for Hegel a way of referring to the relation between subject and object, individual and community, thinking and being in a way that displays a logic of distinction in inseparable relation rather than mere opposition. To say that the object's totality of determinations makes it in itself a being

characterized by spirit is at this stage rather vague. One can take “object” as “object in general” or as God here. We can paraphrase a little, in the light of this. The object/God *in himself* is essence, or a being, or substance (*Wesen* – the normal German word in Christian theology, when treating the Trinity, for the Greek *ousia*) characterized by spirit, if one thinks of the totality of God’s determinations. That is, to contemplate the totality is to do something that spirit does. “Determination” (*Bestimmung*) is used by Hegel in contrast to “in general.” It is a word used when Hegel wants to point to specificity, rather than generality. To speak of the object’s or God’s determinations is to indicate that one intends to say specific things about the object/God, and not just evoke a general divineness. The “whole” of all the specific things said about the object/God produces speech about spirit, Hegel seems to be saying.

It needs to be said clearly at this point that “spirit” does not mean or correspond to the Holy Spirit, if by that one means a person of the Trinity *ad intra*. Spirit is a particular way of talking about humanity and as far as I am aware it *always* qualifies some aspect of human action for Hegel. There is consensus in Hegel’s commentators on this. At the same time, in Christian theology, talk of the spirit is a way of talking of the relation and the bond between divine and human action. The whole point of developing the image of being “filled with the spirit” is to draw attention to the ways in which human action participates in divine action. “Spirit” may not be substitutable for “Holy Spirit” in this discussion, in any direct way, but it may well be a way of drawing attention to the way in which human action participates in something other than itself, especially when “wholes” come into the frame. This is a delicate matter. On the one hand Hegel says that human thinking becomes spirit: he does not mean that there is a process of divinization at work. On the other hand Hegel says that human thinking participates in God: he does mean that divine and human action are bound up with each other in our speech about divine action and human action.¹⁵

It is the next part that is most shocking. We can maximize this shock by treating the object unequivocally as a reference to God. God becomes spirit for consciousness when the self interprets each specific thing said

¹⁵ Theunissen, interpreting a different text, and in an excursus on Bruno Bauer’s interpretation of Hegel, says something rather similar: “The knowledge of God becomes self-knowledge *in* God, that is, in the one who carries and embraces humanity.” Humanity overcomes its abstract separation from God, but never its difference from God. Likewise even though God can only ever be taken as “for” humanity, God nonetheless always remains *God*. Theunissen, *Hegels Lehre*, p. 223. Theunissen also notes that many commentators think they must interpret Hegel either as divinizing humanity or humanizing God (and Bauer takes the latter route). Theunissen insists that this is precisely the kind of false opposition that Hegel seeks to overcome. Theunissen, *Hegels Lehre*, p. 221.

about God as a specific thing said about the self. To ears attuned to the period immediately after Hegel, this screams “Feuerbach!”. It sounds as if speech about God is *really* speech about humanity, but disguised in a way that obscures its true nature. But we should take things a little more calmly. There is precedent in the tradition for saying that speech about God is inseparable from speech about creatures, after all. This is a central plank in question 13 of the *prima pars* of Aquinas’ *Summa Theologiae*: “we can name God only from creatures” (“Non enim possumus nominare Deum nisi ex creaturis,” *ST* 1a 13.5). Hegel has in view something equally radical. When one’s speech about God is governed by a logic of distinction in inseparable relation, the opposition between subject and object, between self and God, is cast in a quite different light. Speech about God becomes a display of the distinction-in-relation, not one-sidedly *either* of the distinction *or* of the relation. The self is implicated in its speech about God, for at least two reasons. First, it is the self who speaks. Second, that speech is a display of a relation, in which the self participates. This is subtle, but one can begin to see why Feuerbach’s parsing of this represents a giant step backwards. *Feuerbach’s claim that speech about God is really speech about humanity is governed by a logic of opposition.* That does not mean that one can dismiss Feuerbach’s claim, however. It means that if one wishes to dismiss it, one’s own claims must be governed by a different logic. To deny Feuerbach’s claim by saying that speech about God is really speech about God, is to turn God into an object over and against the subject, and all talk of participation is rendered unavailable once again. In other words, Feuerbach’s most impressive triumph over theology will be his success in seducing theologians into having their speech about God governed by a logic of opposition. Feuerbach will get nowhere at all, however, if such speech is governed by a logic of distinctness in inseparable relation, a logic of participation. The cure for a bad case of Feuerbach is a healthy dose of Hegel.

Hegel’s claim that taking each of God’s determinations as a determination of the self is only shocking, in other words, if one’s interpretation is guided by a logic of opposition. If one’s interpretation is governed by a logic of participation, then it is not only less shocking, but surprisingly close to Aquinas. The challenge is that Hegel’s text is intended to teach the reader to adopt a logic of participation, and the text can only do that if one’s interpretation is guided by that same logic. If this seems hopelessly circular, perhaps one needs to think a little about how teaching and learning happen. If one interprets Hegel’s text guided by a logic of opposition, it does not make sense, or the sense that it makes is repulsive. Adorno’s influential interpretation of Hegel is guided by just such an opposition at times, as when he turns Hegel’s critique of Kant back on Hegel: “The Hegelian subject-object

is subject.”¹⁶ A certain kind of student either gives up (“I can’t make head or tail of this”) or slams the text shut in revulsion (“I refuse to read further”). Another kind of student is guided by a different double presupposition, which is that Hegel might yet make sense if correctly interpreted, and that if there is an opportunity for a non-repulsive interpretation, one should take it. This is the way of the charitable reading. I suspect that attempts to produce a charitable reading of Hegel are what stimulate doubts about the logic that guides one’s interpretation. Once one has those doubts about *logic*, rather than about Hegel, then the overwhelmingly logical language that Hegel uses become more noticeable, and the rest is a matter of following Hegel’s cues. It may even be that Hegel’s logical language itself stimulates doubts about logic, although to judge from many interpretations of Hegel (which are guided by a logic of opposition) its success is not guaranteed. Of course, one may harbor doubts about Hegel after such a conversion, but these will not be the same doubts, and one will be battling Hegel on the right terrain.

Suppose that we agree to take seriously a logic of participation, and thus agree provisionally to accept that such a logic means that speech about God and speech about the self are as close as the *relation* between God and self, what then? The answer to this is: the rest of the chapter. We have interpreted thus far one paragraph of “Absolute Knowing,” and we have arrived at a recapitulation of “spirit.” The remainder of the chapter will spell out the implications of being guided by a logic of participation.

The story of the *Phenomenology* is the story of consciousness as it becomes self-consciousness, and is discovered to be spirit. The reader of the *Phenomenology* starts out with forms of thought governed by a logic of opposition, and gradually learns to adopt a logic of participation. If one asks, “what does it take to make this discovery and to learn this logic?” Hegel’s implicit answer in the *Phenomenology* is: it takes a lot of failure. Failure has a certain aspect when viewed from the inside. It is an experience of breakdown and reconfiguration. Hegel calls these “shapes of consciousness.” Failure has a different aspect when viewed from the perspective of the reader of the *Phenomenology*. It is a process of seeing implicit performances of various kinds becoming explicit for self-consciousness. The following paragraph, concerning the object and its various incomplete aspects, draws attention to the way in which “consciousness” (i.e. what I am calling the “inside” perspective) does not take the object (i.e. the religious object, God) to be characterized by spirit (i.e. in a way that is explicit about the subject’s participation in the object); this is in contrast to the way in which “we” (i.e.

¹⁶ Theodor Adorno, *Drei Studien zu Hegel* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1963), p. 261. Adorno’s claim can either be taken as evidence that Adorno’s interpretation is guided by a logic of opposition, or as the claim that Hegel remains guided by a logic of opposition even though he attempts an alternative.

the reader of the *Phenomenology*) notice “moments” in the object and in the orientation (or conduct, or comportment – *Verhalten*) of consciousness. We (the implied reader) discern participation, where consciousness discerns opposition, because we adopt (at some point in our reading) a logic of distinction in inseparable relation, where consciousness follows a logic of opposition.

The shape of the next few sections is a recapitulation of much earlier chapters of the *Phenomenology*.

The object is therefore in part immediate being, that is, a thing per se, something which corresponds to immediate consciousness. In part, it is a coming-to-be-the-other of itself, its relation, that is, being for an other and being-for-itself, the determinateness which corresponds to perception, and, in part, it is essence, that is, the universal which corresponds to the understanding. The object as a whole is the syllogism, that is, the movement of the universal into individuality by way of determination, as well as the converse movement from individuality to the universal by way of sublated individuality, that is, determination. (§789)

Der Gegenstand ist also teils unmittelbares Sein, oder ein Ding überhaupt, was dem unmittelbaren Bewußtsein entspricht; teils ein Anderswerden seiner, sein Verhältnis, oder Sein für Anderes und Für-sich-sein, die Bestimmtheit, was der Wahrnehmung; teils Wesen oder als Allgemeines, was dem Verstande entspricht. Er ist, als Ganzes, der Schluß oder die Bewegung des Allgemeinen durch die Bestimmung zur Einzelheit, wie die umgekehrte, von der Einzelheit durch sie als aufgehobene oder die Bestimmung zum Allgemeinen. (*PhG* 422–423)

This section marks a change in Hegel’s terminology. While the language of immediacy, immediate consciousness, otherness, relation, and perception is familiar from the very earliest chapters of the *Phenomenology*, the language of determination, individual and universal, is not. This highly suggestive language of a movement in two directions – from universal to individual and from individual to universal – is at this stage a promise of a future discussion, which will be redeemed in the *Science of Logic*. The language of syllogism is not unknown in the *Phenomenology* – it appears in the discussion of “Force and the Understanding” and in the famous account of the master and slave in the “Self-Consciousness” section – but it points (for us, who know Hegel’s corpus) to later more explicit discussions in the *Encyclopaedia Logic*. We can note Hegel’s anticipation of continuity between the *Phenomenology* and those later studies. Here the account is

stimulated by a consideration of the object; in the later accounts it will be a consideration of categories of thought. We can also note, however, that even here there is a characteristic double relation between ontology and logic: ontology is cast in logical terms, and logic offers an account of the structure of being, not just of thinking. This is because, for Hegel, being and thinking are always in relation to each other, where each is distinct from the other, but unified in philosophical accounts of being and thinking alike.

We can note the progression that is offered here: immediacy-relation-essence. This is the “phenomenological” description of the progression, which can just as well be cast in logical terms: determination [particular]-individual-universal. Hegel’s characteristic Aristotelian move is to describe this as “motion” (*Bewegung*). Thus references to “essence” and “universal” do not quite do in Hegel’s thought what they do in other forms of modern philosophy. There is a certain kind of abstraction, as there is for Plato in the *Parmenides*, but it is not static or mathematical. It is alive and in motion. Hegel clarifies it in the next sentences:

Consciousness must therefore know the object as itself in terms of these three determinations. Nonetheless, we are not speaking here of knowing as a pure comprehension of the object; rather, this knowing is supposed to be disclosed merely in its coming-to-be, that is, in its moments in terms of the aspects which belong to consciousness as such and in terms of the moments of the genuine concept, that is, of pure knowing in the form of the shapes of consciousness. (§789)

Nach diesen drei Bestimmungen also muß das Bewußtsein ihn als sich selbst wissen. Es ist dies jedoch nicht das Wissen als reines Begreifen des Gegenstandes, von dem die Rede ist; sondern dies Wissen soll nur in seinem Werden oder in seinen Momenten nach der Seite aufgezeigt werden, die dem Bewußtsein als solchem angehört, und die Momente des eigentlichen Begriffes oder reinen Wissens in der Form von Gestaltungen des Bewußtseins. (*PhG* 423)

Each of these three determinations (immediacy-relation-essence or particular-individual-universal) is germane to the object as it is known in consciousness. There is a hierarchy (indeed an ascent) to them, which is experienced and undergone by the thinking subject. But it is obviously not a case of each stage replacing the last: there are still particulars to be experienced even if one knows the universal. But most importantly the subject is itself in motion, and the “aspects” (or sides – *Seite*) are best understood as “moments.” These belong not to the object, in this paragraph, but to consciousness. It is consciousness that has moments, and these moments are shown up in the kinds of knowledge that consciousness has of the

object. That knowledge is “pure” when these moments display the “genuine concept” (*der eigentliche Begriff*). We should notice the relation between singular and plural terms here. Moments, in the plural, are predicated of the concept, in the singular. As I suggested earlier, for Hegel the concept is an expression of the unity and its moments are expressions of the genuine distinctions that persist in that unity. The logic that guides this claim is emphatically Chalcedonian or Trinitarian: it preserves distinctions and at the same time expresses unity. For a logic of opposition (a Manichean logic) one must choose: unity *or* distinctions? For a logic of participation (a Chalcedonian logic) one must “sublate”: unity *in* inseparable relation.

It becomes evident that for theologically minded readers this is the point, in this second paragraph in “Absolute Knowing,” where some fundamental decisions have to be made about Hegel or, better, about the *Phenomenology*. The object in question is God: this is clear from the references that guide the reader back to the previous chapter on “Religion.” When Hegel brings a Chalcedonian logic to bear on the relation between subject and object, where there is a unity in inseparable relation, this is a unity of the divine and the human which preserves the distinction. The broadly orthodox theologian (which is the only kind of theologian in view here) is bound to wonder: is “distinction” enough? For theologians “infinite qualitative difference” is more familiar than “unity in inseparable relation.” Kierkegaard’s (and then Barth’s) infinite qualitative difference seems to safeguard God’s divinity much better than Hegel’s unity in inseparable relation. But Barth was responding in part to Feuerbach more emphatically than he was to Hegel; and the Hegel he read was Lasson’s edition of the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* much more than the *Phenomenology*, and Hegel’s logical claims are taken for granted (rather than argued for) in the later lectures. They are easily (and often) missed. Barth was concerned more with ontology than with logic, as are most theologians. Feuerbach asserts the identity of divine and human action: speech about God’s action is *really* speech about human action. Hegel does not assert their identity: he asserts their union in inseparable relation. This, indeed, is the reason for calling this logic Chalcedonian rather than Trinitarian, even though the same logic guides both the doctrine of the Trinity (in its language of triunity) and the Chalcedonian formula (in its language of union without separation). Trinitarian speech does not govern relations between divine and human action, but relations between Father, Son, and Spirit. But Chalcedonian speech does govern relations between divine and human, *in the one person Jesus Christ*. What Hegel does – explicitly – is to extend this to relation between divine and human *in the one human subject* by virtue of its participation in spirit. I am willing to follow Hegel along this path for a further reason, which he himself does not give, namely my own Anglican tradition of speaking of participation in the body of Christ, where what Lutheran theology specifies

(perhaps over-specifies) as the “communication of idioms” is much vaguer – and generatively so – in liturgical performances of the ways in which Jesus’ divinity and humanity is dispersed in the community of the Church. Catholic and Orthodox theologians will surely find analogous resources in their own traditions. Hamann (an important Lutheran predecessor for Hegel) had suggested that the *communicatio idiomatum* applied not just to Christ but to the whole of human knowledge.¹⁷

The language of “communication of idioms” is an attempt to describe more precisely how the divine nature and the human nature of Christ relate to each other. Chalcedon had left this vague, and such vagueness invites attempts at greater specification. In Aristotelian metaphysics substance persists and accidents change. In medieval metaphysics governing the sacrament of the Eucharist this is inventively reversed: accidents persist and the substance (the bread) changes (the body of Christ). The Lutheran account of the communication of idioms follows the latter reversal and applies it to the Chalcedonian formula: the substances (divine and human) are different but the accidents (the idioms) are shared. Chalcedon was vague about predicates: it said only that they were “preserved” and were “concurrent” in the one “person” and “subsistence.” Lutheran theology attempted to be more specific: predicates (“idioms”) are exchanged (“communicated”) between the two natures. In my view it is wise to remain vague about these kinds of issue in formal documents, even if it is desirable to be more experimentally precise in one’s adventurous theological explorations. Orthodoxy to a significant extent may be a matter of wise vagueness.

Hegel does not acknowledge his debt to Hamann, but whether directly or indirectly he certainly takes up the suggestion and makes it a central plank in his logic. His added move is to elide Chalcedonian with Trinitarian language: it is not speech about the body of Christ but speech about the spirit that governs the unity. What Hamann attempted through Christology, Hegel attempted through Pneumatology, one might say. The upshot in the paragraph in question is that “pure knowledge” is a unity (in the concept) of the different moments (of the shapes of consciousness).

What, then, of the difference between divine and human action? Has Hegel abolished it or not? The answer to this question turns on whether the reader adopts Hegel’s Chalcedonian logic of participation or an alternative Manichean logic of opposition. If one’s reading is governed by opposition, then the question is: unity *or* distinction? Is God’s action the same as *or* different from human action? In the face of such a question, Hegel’s philosophy seems overwhelmingly to assert unity and sameness. His is in the end

¹⁷ J.G. Hamann, *Writings on Philosophy and Language* (ed. K. Haynes, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 99.

a denial of transcendence.¹⁸ If one's reading is governed by participation, then the question is: what kind of unity *in* distinction? In what ways are God's action and human action distinct in inseparable relation? In the face of this question, Hegel's philosophy is (at this point of the chapter) vague, and we need to read on.

Before we do so, one further awkward detail needs to be confronted. It appears, in my reading, that the reader is presented with alternative logics that guide interpretation of the text. What criteria govern the reader's judgments about the logic by which one chooses to be guided? Yet logics are not chosen but learned. I have used highly loaded terms (Manichean versus Chalcedonian) for theatrical effect: to exert pressure upon theological readers to reassess the logics which guide their thinking. But such theatrical oppositions (themselves "Manichean") can only serve as stimulus to consider questions of logic, and cannot – should not – in the end decide them. It is obviously not the case that a theologically minded reader must decide between oppositional and participative logics. Binary oppositions play a vital role in judgment, just as triadic relations play a vital role in reconciliation. The logic displayed by Jesus in the synoptic Gospels is more often oppositional and in John's Gospel it is (in the farewell discourses) more participative. There is, for a broadly orthodox theologically minded reader, no choice to be made between them: both persist, in relation to each other. Likewise, in questions of logic, there is no question of participative logic displacing oppositional logic. Rather one learns a *further* participative logic that relates to a rightly *persistent* oppositional logic. The question is which logic is operative in relation to which questions. The question before the reader of Hegel is, in the first instance, which logic should guide one's account of subject and object, and subsequently which logic should guide one's account of the relation between divine and human action. Hegel certainly answers these questions. He insists that when one's account of subject and object is guided by opposition, the result is a series of failures which stimulate a reassessment first of the object and then of logic itself. He also insists that when one's account of God is guided by opposition, the result is an insufficiently participative account of human action: it fails to account for human action as itself spirit. One can argue with Hegel in both cases, but such an argument can only get under way if one grasps that there are distinct patterns of reasoning in play. One needs to learn the Chalcedonian logic before one is in a position to judge the relation between oppositional and participative (binary and triadic) logics. My argument is twofold. First, one cannot give an adequate account of Hegel without learning triadic logic; second, it will not be a straight fight between binary and triadic logics once

¹⁸ This is the reading of William Desmond in *Hegel's God: A Counterfeit Double* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003).

the difference between them has been grasped. It will be a relation between them.

We can now quicken the pace of interpretation and be more selective. Hegel goes on in §789 to consider how it is that the reader of the *Phenomenology* grasps the concept whereas for consciousness (in the earlier chapters of the *Phenomenology*) the object does not appear in the same light:

For that reason, the object does not yet appear in consciousness as such as the spiritual essentiality in the way that we just expressed it, and the conduct of consciousness in regard to the object is neither that of considering it in this totality as such, nor that of considering it in its purely conceptual form. Rather, it is in part a shape of consciousness *per se* and in part a number of such shapes that *we* gather together, within which the totality of the moments of the object and of the conduct of consciousness can be pointed out merely as having been dissolved in the totality's moments. (§789)

Darum erscheint der Gegenstand im Bewußtsein als solchem noch nicht als die geistige Wesenheit, wie sie von uns soeben ausgesprochen wurde, und sein Verhalten zu ihm ist nicht die Betrachtung desselben in dieser Totalität als solcher, noch in ihrer reinen Begriffsform, sondern teils Gestalt des Bewußtseins überhaupt, teils eine Anzahl solcher Gestalten, die *wir* zusammennehmen, und in welchen die Totalität der Momente des Gegenstandes und des Verhaltens des Bewußtseins nur aufgelöst in ihre Momente aufgezeigt werden kann. (*PhG* 423)

The object in question here is the same object as the previous chapter: God. The main contrast in play here is between “consciousness” and “we.” Things appear to consciousness, at a certain point in its development, in particular ways; but “we” (the readers of the *Phenomenology*) are in better shape and can grasp the “parts” of the experience of consciousness as a “whole” or “totality.” This is an activity, rather than something that falls into our lap: we “gather together,” and this labor is the labor of philosophical inquiry.

§790 refers back to the early chapter on “observing reason,” and the change in the quality of opposition displayed in the logic which guides consciousness: instead of being aware only of the object, it is also aware of its own activity. This is a real advance. But consciousness gets its genuine insight wrong. The subject's awareness of its own subjectivity leads it to infer that it too is a thing, just like the object. The subject has a number of ontological categories available to it, as it describes what kind of thing it takes itself to be. It might be a “sensuous, immediate thing” or an “invisible, infallible

thing” (a “soul”). But so long as it follows a logic in which subject is opposed to object, it is “spirit-less.” Interpreted according to a logic of participation, however (“in terms of its *concept*”), it is intensely characterized by spirit. Everything hangs on the logic which guides the interpretation.

In other words, “observing reason” follows a logic of opposition, which ruins the genuine and important insights it produces in relation to subjectivity and objectivity. The final part of this paragraph seems rather gnomic:

Taken in that way, that former judgment is devoid of spirit, or to a greater degree is itself utter spiritlessness. However, in terms of its *concept*, it is in fact the richest in spirit, and this, its *inner*, which is not yet *present* in the concept, is what is expressed in the two other moments which are still to be examined. (§790)

Jedes Urteil so genommen wie es unmittelbar lautet, ist es geistlos oder vielmehr das Geistlose selbst. Seinem *Begriffe* nach aber ist es in der Tat das geistreichste, und dieses *Imre* desselben, das an ihm noch nicht *vorhanden* ist, ist es was die beiden andern zu betrachtenden Momente aussprechen. (*PhG* 423)

This is one of those passages that can cause the reader to stare at the text in disbelief and frustration. It is very vague; but it also seems terribly important, whatever it means. The main thing to notice is the contrast between “utter spiritlessness” (*das Geistlose selbst*) and “the richest in spirit” (*das geistreichste*). (I do not think it is important that one term is a capitalized noun and the other an adjectival term.) The secondary thing to notice is that this contrast depends on how one takes the judgment about the being of the I. In one case, we end up with utter spiritlessness; but in another case we are rewarded with the richest in spirit. This is relatively straightforward to interpret. If the I is reduced to a mere thing, then the product is utter spiritlessness. But if we take the judgment about the being of the I “in terms of its *concept*” (*seinem Begriffe nach*), this is the richest in spirit. The question thus becomes: what does it mean to take the being of the I in terms of its concept? And this is of course a question about the whole of the *Phenomenology*. We can answer it in logical terms: the being of the I has to be taken as a relation between subject and object, where each term is distinct but in relation, rather than where the two terms are falsely opposed to each other. In more everyday language, if the I is either subject or object, the game is over; but if “the I” is a way of talking about the relation of subject and object, we are in the realm of spirit, and in a most intense way.

It is worth noticing, as an added benefit, that Hegel is dealing here in questions of how judgments are taken, rather than in straightforward ontology. He is not asking, “what kind of thing is the I?”. Hegel says that as

soon as one asks that question (which, after all, seems a rather good question), one is in deep trouble. This is because “things” are object-like *rather than* subject-like. Instead, Hegel is asking, “how should one take judgments about the I?” Or in different words: “what is going on when one talks about the I?” This “taking” is more a question of logic than of ontology. There is “oppositional” taking; and there is “participative” taking. When Hegel talks about “the concept” he is referring to the latter. In other words, one cannot in any straightforward way say that the I is either spiritless or spirit-rich. The I is what it is; it is how one takes judgments about it that inhibits or produces spirit.

§791 begins by drawing the lesson from the chapter on “Observing Reason”:

The thing is I: In fact, in this infinite judgment, the thing is sublated; it is nothing in itself; it only has any meaning in relationships, only by virtue of the I and its relation to the I. – This moment emerged for consciousness in pure insight and Enlightenment. (§791).

Das Ding ist Ich; in der Tat ist in diesem unendlichen Urteile das Ding aufgehoben; es ist nichts an sich; es hat nur Bedeutung im Verhältnisse, nur durch Ich und seine Beziehung auf dasselbe. – Dies Moment hat sich für das Bewußtsein in der reinen Einsicht und Aufklärung ergeben. (*PhG* 423)

This is one of the most important passages in this chapter on “Absolute Knowing.” It marks a lucid summary of a key “moment” or “shape of consciousness” in which the subject changes its orientation to the object. Instead of thinking that it has to do with an object “out there,” the subject comes to the realization that the object *only* has meaning in relationships, and *only* has significance because of its relation to the subject. (This marks a stride across the earlier chapters from “Observing Reason” to the part of the chapter on “Spirit” that concerns the Enlightenment.)

The problem with this insight lies in the word “only.” For Hegel, “only” is often a sign that an errant logic is operative. In this case, the errant logic is Kantian: “the thing . . . is nothing in itself” echoes Kant’s language of the thing in itself, but also critiques it as empty. But errant logics, for Hegel, do not generate mere falsity. They generate truth, but of a one-sided kind. In this case, the object is rightly taken to be meaningful because of its relation to the subject, but because it takes it “only” to be meaningful in this way, the object is robbed of its integrity. By this point in the text “object” seems no longer to refer to God, and appears to denote ordinary objects in the world. Hegel does not make this explicit. Nor is it clear to me where the shift from object as God to object as ordinary object occurs. Many commentators might take this as grounds for claiming that the whole chapter from the

start is not about God as an object. I take the more blurred view that Hegel starts with one conception and moves to another without himself marking the change.

Things are purely and simply *useful* and are merely to be considered in terms of their utility. . . . It thus articulates sense-certainty as absolute truth, but it articulates this *being-for-itself* as itself a moment which merely disappears and passes over into its opposite, into “being for an other” in the sense of being at the disposal of an other. (§791)

Die Dinge sind schelchthin *nützlich*, und nur nach ihrer Nützlichkeit zu betrachten. . . . es spricht die sinnliche Gewißheit als absolute Wahrheit aus, aber dies *Fürsichsein* selbst als Moment, das nur verschwindet, und in sein Gegenteil, in das preisgegebne Sein für anderes übergeht. (*PhG* 424)

Hegel makes the dark side of this one-sidedness explicit: the subject interprets the value of the object to lie solely in its usefulness to the subject. The object becomes “disposable” we might say. Two of Hegel’s idiosyncratic terms appear here: “being-for-itself” and “being for an other.” This distinction is part of a wider tripartite taxonomy of ways of taking objects: being-in-itself, being-for-itself, being-in-and-for-itself. These correspond to shifts in the logics that govern relations between subjects and objects. Students reading Hegel for the first time often find this taxonomy mysterious, but it is a mistake to think that Hegel is being intentionally innovative here. As so often in Hegel’s project, he is trying to find suitable German expression for technical Aristotelian terms, or perhaps better, he is re-authoring a series of Aristotelian insights in non-scholastic language. In this case, the German *an sich*, *für sich*, *an und für sich* are part of Hegel’s rethinking of Aristotle’s terms *dunamis* (potentiality) *energeia* (actuality), and *entelecheia* (which has no Latin or English term). In Aristotle’s project, we are dealing with questions of motion, and with different kinds of being and action displayed by objects and persons. Aristotle himself is experimental in his use of these terms, and there is much debate on how best to interpret him, especially when these terms appear in *Metaphysics* Θ. For the purposes of understanding Hegel, we will have to be content with some over-simplification. For Aristotle, potentiality designates a thing’s innate or implicit capacities. Something “is” what it is capable of, independently of how it actually manifests itself in the world. Actuality describes a thing’s expression or achievement of its potential: it is the making explicit of what is otherwise implicit. Entelechy (also rather confusingly translated “actuality” by some) refers to the completion or full achievement of the relation between potentiality and

actuality. Because “actuality” itself also refers to completion, there is significant overlap between actuality and entelechy. What entelechy adds is the sense of “telos,” of “goal,” that a being has. It describes not just what it is capable of, and in fact does, but where it is headed, what its end is, what it is for.

Hegel is concerned with these questions too, and he deals with them through the modern lens of questions of subjectivity and objectivity, not just the ancient lenses of motion and the good life. *An sich* (*dunamis*) describes an object considered independently of how it is taken by a subject. (This echoes Kant’s use of the phrase in his *Ding an sich* in the *Critique of Pure Reason*.) It is what an object implicitly is. But, echoing Aristotle’s usage, it also denotes a certain possibility in an object; it anticipates that it might be other than it is, that it might change. It thus anticipates the future of the object, and not just what it happens to be. *Für sich* (*energeia*) describes an object considered as it is taken by a subject; if the object is a conscious agent, it describes an object as it takes itself. (This anticipates Heidegger’s use of *Dasein*, understood as a being that makes its own interests explicit.) It is what an object explicitly is. Following Aristotle, it is also an object’s achieving the change it is capable of, or becoming what it truly is. Whereas *an sich* does not have subjects in view, *für sich* makes subjectivity core to an account of the object. *An-und-für-sich* (*entelecheia*) expresses a more definite distinction than Aristotle is generally held to have: it describes an object in a way that overcomes the one-sidedness of mere “objectivity” or “subjectivity.” Those who think in English encounter some challenges here, because *an-und-für-sich* is an everyday phrase in German whereas “in and for itself” sounds like the deepest of gnostic mysteries. There is no good way to translate it, just as there is no good way to translate *entelecheia*. The best way to handle it, in my view, is to remember that Hegel is concerned to overcome the false opposition between subject and object, and that *an-und-für-sich* is his shorthand for when this is achieved. It thus has much in common with “concept” in his philosophy.

I am not claiming that there is a strong one-to-one correspondence between Aristotle’s Greek terms and Hegel’s German ones.¹⁹ It is much better to think, in a rather vaguer way, of Hegel handling some of the same issues as Aristotle. Like Aristotle, Hegel draws distinctions and produces a threefold taxonomy, and like Aristotle, the task of this taxonomy is to

¹⁹ Alfredo Ferrarin’s study of the relation of Hegel to Aristotle, *Hegel and Aristotle* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), shows just how complex the relation is, across a range of Hegel’s works, including those where he comments directly on Aristotle. Ferrarin’s reluctance to consider the *Phenomenology* in his study is noteworthy; but see Allegra de Laurentiis, “Absolute Knowing,” which is bold in its identification of Aristotelian themes, and whose example I follow.

get at questions of implicitness and explicitness, possibility and fulfillment, stability and change. Nonetheless, I do think that any discussion of Hegel's terms is deficient if it does not explicitly connect them with Aristotle's *Metaphysics*. There is room for debate about how the connection goes, but not about the connection as such.

We can return to our distinction, in §791, between "being for itself" and "being for another." This is not a distinction Aristotle makes, as it is centrally concerned with questions of subjectivity and objectivity, in a way that is governed by problems bequeathed by Descartes and Kant. Aristotle did not have these problems. The distinction in §791 is intended to draw attention to an ambiguity in actuality, when this is treated in modern philosophy – an ambiguity that did not trouble Aristotle. Being for itself achieves a measure of completion and of explicitness. But a question about the integrity of the object arises for modern philosophy. To consider an object's "significance" (signaled by Hegel in his use of *Bedeutung*) is to refer it to a subject. Where there is no subject, there is no significance, because there is no one for whom something might have significance. But once significance is on the table, then it appears that an object's being is reducible to its significance for a subject. And here we get the distinction between "being for itself" (which is broadly Aristotelian) and "being for another" (which is broadly utilitarian). Modern philosophy makes two problematic moves. First, it falsely divides subject from object; second, it reduces the significance of the object to its usefulness to the subject. The integrity of the object is not only threatened: it is radically undermined. Kant had seen this danger, and in his moral theory he insists that persons are ends in themselves, and cannot be reduced to their significance for others who wish to use them. But this insistence is just a statement of the problem. The question is how to develop an account of subjects and objects in such a way that "being for itself" does not degenerate into "being for an other." Better, the challenge is to find a way of speaking of "being for an other" that does not collapse into domination, utility, and narcissism. This cannot, for Hegel, be a matter of resolving subjectivity and objectivity on the side of the subject, as Kant does: it must be a matter of offering a better logic for governing the relation of subject and object. §791 states the problem, and outlines the stage in the history of ideas, around the turn of the nineteenth century, where this problem becomes acute. What follows is a discussion of what impact this has upon epistemology.

§792 summarizes the next shape of consciousness, "Morality," which is the shape that immediately precedes the chapter on "Religion." This shape has a certain Kantian character – it describes being as either "pure will" or "pure knowledge," which reflects Kant's attempt to do justice both to pure reason in the first *Critique* and practical reason in the second.²⁰ This

²⁰ The Kantian character of these claims is noted by Hyppolite: *Genesis and Structure*, p. 594.

is an interesting shift. The discussion in §791 was about the reduction of being-for-itself to being-for-another. §792 now offers a different account of “the thing” (which at this point coincides with the I), one in which there is not just “immediacy” and “determination,” but “essence” and “the inner.” Hegel’s recapitulation of the earlier discussion has some puzzling features at this point:

The thing must become known not merely in terms of the immediacy of being and its determinateness, but also as the *essence*, that is, as the *inner* as the self. This is present within *moral self-consciousness*. (§792)

... es muß nicht nur nach der Unmittelbarkeit des Seins and nach der Bestimmtheit, sondern auch als *Wesen* oder *Inneres*, als das Selbst gewußt werden. Dies ist in dem *moralischen Selbstbewußtsein* vorhanden. (*PhG* 424)

“Moral self-consciousness” unambiguously refers the reader back to the chapter on “Spirit,” and more particularly to the sub-section on “spirit certain of itself: morality” (§596ff.). The language of “the inner” or “the self” (especially as this deals with the self as a thing – which was the focus of §791) refers much further back, to the chapter on “reason,” and the discussion of §344ff. The puzzle is to know how much ground is being traversed in this summary, and where the focus of that summary lies. I shall assume that in §792 it lies in the “Spirit” chapter and (following Hyppolite and many other commentators) the critique of Kant. It is nonetheless worth remarking that this earlier section of the *Phenomenology* is not much concerned with “the inner” (whereas a great deal of the even earlier chapter on “Reason” is). Hegel goes on:

This [moral consciousness] knows its knowing as the *absolute essentiality*, that is, knows *being* per se as the pure will or pure knowing; it is nothing but just this will and this knowing; (§792)

Dies weiß sein Wissen als die *absolute Wesenheit*, oder das *Sein* schlechthin als den reinen Willen oder Wissen; es *ist* nichts, als nur dieser Willen und Wissen; (*PhG* 424)

This compressed clause takes us to the heart of Hegel’s critique of Kant, or at least one aspect of it: the failure to do justice to the relation between thinking and being. Hegel’s compressed claim is that, in certain philosophical discussions (e.g. Kant’s discussion of morality) being is “nothing but” will and knowledge. It is customary in much commentary on Hegel not to get drawn into the question of whether Hegel is fair or not to Kant, but simply to offer a reliable account of Hegel’s arguments. Hegel’s criticism is certainly

sweeping: the combining of “will” and “knowledge” encompasses both the first and second *Critiques*. To put Hegel’s critique in the most charitable form possible, Kant is right to tackle questions of being as simultaneously questions of thinking; and in treating questions of moral consciousness, and their relation to being, Kant is right to take questions of willing and knowing seriously. The problem is that the account is one-sided, and being gets swallowed up in thinking and willing. Interestingly, it does not get swallowed up in acting, for Hegel. Hegel has a subsidiary critique of Kant, which is that the account of action is far too dominated by *thinking* about action. In the Greek terms considered in the previous section, potentiality dominates actuality, and this is the wrong way round for Hegel (as it is for Aristotle). For Hegel action precedes reflection logically and temporally. Those aspects of being (specifically human being) that are distinct from thinking (although related to it), such as drives, inclinations, and sensibility, get neglected by Kant. Hegel is especially interested (in §603ff.) in the ways in which moral consciousness takes its thinking (especially about duties) so seriously that it undermines its capacity to act. Pure duty is a wonderful, pure thought. And getting one’s hands dirty in the course of messy historical life threatens that purity. Carrying out one’s duties often involves compromises of various kinds, and any account which takes a dim view of compromises (as Kant’s account does, for Hegel) thus actually undermines the exercise of duty. Hegel mocks the Kantian subject twice: first for “switching back and forth between taking a position, then hedging about its position,” and then for resolving the contradiction through a one-sided retreat into “pure certainty of itself.” The spectacle of the moral consciousness which identifies its duty, and then dithers over how to act without compromising its purity, is comical enough; but it is tragic that the resolution of this anxiety is an utter failure to act, and a withdrawal from the social world. Hegel is not necessarily saying that such people actually exist; he is claiming that this is the kind of person one would meet if Kantian moral theory described everyday life. Of course such people do exist: one sees this kind of moral consciousness in certain kinds of administrator who inflexibly insist upon following proper procedures even when this produces utter stalemate in a meeting, and even when this causes (and can be seen in advance to cause) enormous unnecessary suffering on the part of those affected by such procedures. The administrator’s purity of moral consciousness is purchased – often rather cheerfully – at the price of another’s misery.

§793 makes the logic that guides the discussion explicit. The shapes or moments surveyed in the previous paragraphs (and, behind them, in the previous chapters) are what enable one to see “the reconciliation of spirit” (*die Versöhnung des Geistes*). This has an explicitly theological resonance. Again this is not because Hegel has an idea about logical form, and then by happy accident alights on poetic language from Christian doctrine which

can add some color to his account. On the contrary, Hegel discerns in the Christian tradition a kind of logic which relates God and humanity in a certain way, and this logic can be put to work governing all sorts of relations between subject and object. I have referred to this (following Wendte) as “Chalcedonian logic” or a “logic of participation”; here Hegel characterizes it as a logic of reconciliation. We can summarize this, in a way that Hegel does not. Just as Christ reconciles humanity and God through his death and resurrection, so in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* one can discern the way in which subject and object are reconciled, through succeeding shapes of consciousness.

Hegel now summarizes the final paragraphs that precede the “Religion” chapter. The Fichtean subject (or perhaps the Kantian subject, read in a Fichtean way), with its sense of its own activity, and its reduction of the meaning of objectivity to its own activity, experiences multiple failures because it does not, in fact, act in splendid isolation. The Kantian/Fichtean subject confronts other Kantian/Fichtean subjects, and this sets in motion a chain of insights, in which the purity of the other’s actions is both affirmed (because meaning is reducible to the self’s intention) but also denied (where the other’s actions are opposed to my own). Attempts are made to find a way to make sense of individual action and to find a “universal” context in which that individual action can be located. Once a universal subjectivity is in play, then the individuality of the subject which pulls away from this universality is perceived by others *and by the self* as “evil.” This causes a crisis of confidence, a confession of one’s own evil, and a reconciliation in social life brought about through mutual forgiveness. In the text which concludes the chapter on “Spirit” the narrative is presented as successive attempts to negotiate the generativity of the individual subject, and the universality of the community and its laws. The logic displayed, and the language used to describe it, are explicitly liturgical. The dynamic interplay of confession, recognition, forgiveness, and reconciliation is a rather good description of the opening drama of the Mass, or Eucharist, or Lord’s Supper, where the congregation engages in a performance of confession and reconciliation, as preparation for the liturgical action of textual interpretation (in readings from scripture and the sermon) and then the performance of participation in the body of Christ (in the breaking and sharing of bread).

It comes more naturally to theologians than to philosophers to interpret the transition from the end of the chapter on “Spirit” (with the performance of confession and reconciliation), through the chapter on “Religion” (with the performance of “representation”) to the chapter on “Absolute Knowing” (with the performance of participation) as a philosophical articulation of the logic of the liturgy of the Eucharist, as it moves from confession, to the liturgy of the word, to the liturgy of the sacrament. (Different Christian traditions obviously have different descriptions of this shape.) The logic of

this movement, at the end of the chapter on “Spirit,” is one in which opposed “I”s move from a logic of opposition to a logic of participation:

The reconciling yes in which both I’s let go of their opposed existence, is the existence of the I expanded into two-ness, which therein remains selfsame and which has the certainty of itself in its complete self-emptying and in its opposite. – It is God appearing in the midst of those who know themselves as pure knowing. (§671)

Das versöhnende JA, worin beide Ich von ihrem entgegengesetzten Dasein ablassen, ist das Dasein des zur Zweiheit ausgedehnten Ichs, das darin sich gleich bleibt, und in seiner vollkommenen Entäußerung und Gegenteile die Gewißheit seiner selbst hat; – es ist der erscheinende Gott mitten unter ihnen, die sich als das reine Wissen wissen. (*PhG* 362)

The crucial change is reconciliation: this generates a transition from opposition (*entgegengesetztes Dasein*) to relation (*Zweiheit*, or “two-ness” – although this is a common enough word, that is normally rendered as “duality,” it here represents one of Hegel’s most important logical discoveries). Hegel associates this transformation from “two terms” into “a pair” with God appearing in the community. This is striking. It is not merely that two subjects have come to discover their mutual relation; it is that this mutual relation is participation in God. The relation between subjects is not direct, in other words. It is not a mere contract between two parties; it is a kind of marriage and – like marriage – something done “before God.”

The foregoing discussion is a summary of Hegel’s own summary in §793. The terminus of this recognition is a move away from merely individual knowledge towards “the universal”:

For self-consciousness therefore actuality, as *immediate existence*, has no other meaning than that of being pure knowing; but equally, as *determinate existence*, or as a relationship, that which stands over against itself is a knowing of knowing itself as universal. At the same time, it is therein posited that the *third* moment, *universality*, that is, the *essence*, counts merely as *knowing* for each of the two which are confronting the other. They

Die Wirklichkeit hat also hier für das Selbstbewußtsein sowohl als *unmittelbares Dasein* keine andere Bedeutung, als das reine Wissen zu sein; – ebenso als *bestimmtes Dasein*, oder als Verhältnis, ist das sich Gegenüberstehende ein Wissen teils von diesem rein einzelnen Selbst, teils von dem Wissen als allgemeinem. Hierin ist zugleich dies gesetzt, daß das *dritte* Moment, die *Allgemeinheit* oder das *Wesen* jedem der beiden gegenüberstehenden nur

finally sublata the empty opposition which still remains, and they are the knowing of the “I = I,” that is, this *individual* self which is immediately pure knowing, that is, is the universal. (§793)²¹

als Wissen gilt; und den leeren noch übrigen Gegensatz heben sie endlich ebenso auf, und sind das Wissen des Ich = Ich; dieses *einzelne* Selbst, das unmittelbar reines Wissen oder allgemeines ist. (*PhG* 425)

This is a familiar kind of discussion in the *Phenomenology*, even though its particular claims here are rather obscurely articulated. It is a discussion about partial insights, won here by self-consciousness, with a view to anticipating what a more adequate insight might be. The key structural terms here are “in part . . . in part . . .” (*teils . . . teils . . .*). The discussion concerns different moments. Earlier in this paragraph Hegel flags for the reader the fact that there are three moments, and the third is the last. The three movements are, first, knowledge of the thing as “immediate being”; second, knowledge of the thing “as the self”; third, as “universality.” Hegel describes this third moment as a matter of “unity” (*Einheit*) and indeed as “spiritual unity” (*geistige Einheit*). In the terms of Greek philosophy, we are dealing with some version of the relation of potentiality, actuality, and entelecheia. The language of the “universal” is explicitly Aristotelian rather than Platonic here.²² It is not so much an abstraction from sense experience as the statement of a relation between subject and object. The final clauses of this paragraph are difficult to interpret, and thus to translate. Pinkard’s translation, here retained unchanged, brings out the most important feature, which is also the feature that makes it difficult to interpret: it contains a series of alternatives, which seem to be substitutes for each other. We can list them:

- (1) knowledge of the I = I
- (2) this individual self
- (3) immediately pure knowledge
- (4) universal

(Pinkard adds the definite article, “the universal,” to bring out Hegel’s inflection of the adjective *allgemeines*.)

²¹ The first part of this paragraph has been retranslated by Nicholas Walker.

²² For corroboration, see the discussion of “universality” in the *Lectures on the History of Philosophy* on the difference between Aristotle and Plato. Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, vol. 2: *Plato and the Platonists*, p. 144.

In some sense these four terms refer to the same moment, for self-consciousness at this stage of its self-understanding. Hegel does not explain it in this paragraph: he leaves it as a bare claim. Rather than try to interpret it here, in a way that would depart from Hegel's terse formulation, we can instead simply draw attention to its character: it is an abbreviated statement. Self-relation is in some way convertible with the universal.

Hyppolite goes much further: this passage in the *Phenomenology* marks for him the beginning of a new section of commentary on "universal self-consciousness." He notes that the language of "the universal" is logical language, and thus indicates a prefiguration of concerns that Hegel will take up in the *Science of Logic*. But he also suggests, in a way that is problematic, two further claims. These are doubtless offered as clarifications, but they go considerably beyond what is warranted in the text. These are (1) "this element of existence is the *universal self-consciousness being-there in 'the universal divine man'*," and (2) "the self-consciousness of the absolute will be possible." This latter claim is supported by citing the part of §793 that I too have cited above, and then glossing it even more emphatically: this "is absolute knowing itself, a knowing which is simultaneously the knowing that the absolute has of itself and that of this finite spirit which raises itself to universal self-consciousness."²³ This is certainly an influential reading: indeed it shapes many readers' sense of the entire final chapter of the *Phenomenology* – it expresses the idea that absolute knowledge is knowledge that something called "the absolute" has. The further implication is that "the absolute" is God; and this means that the final chapter of the *Phenomenology* allegedly offers access to the kind of knowledge that God has.

This is nonsense. And it is nonsense in a number of different ways.

It is nonsense from Hyppolite's perspective, to begin with. Hyppolite problematically talks of "the knowledge that the absolute has of itself," but he does not take "the absolute" to mean God. Quite the reverse: for Hyppolite it is "religion" that thinks in this way, and for Hyppolite "absolute knowledge" unequivocally supersedes religion.²⁴ Religion takes itself to be receiving something alien to itself, whereas in absolute knowledge the content of thinking is not so much received as produced or generated.²⁵ This is a more Feuerbachian reading of "absolute knowing," in which the human subject appropriates what is rightfully its own cognitive dignity. It is a reading which views the final chapter of the *Phenomenology* through the lens of the "unhappy consciousness" section of the earlier "Self-Consciousness"

²³ Hyppolite, *Genesis and Structure*, pp. 595–596.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 597.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 598–599.

chapter. For Hyppolite, “the absolute” is Hegel’s way of talking about “a new period in the history of the world spirit.”²⁶ Lauer, commenting on this paragraph and the one that follows it, offers a related rubric for any reading of “absolute knowledge”: “We simply must insist that, when Hegel speaks in this manner, he is quite consciously – and legitimately – speaking of *human* spirit.”²⁷ This echoes Hyppolite to a significant extent, although it is inflected by a somewhat less conflictual assessment of the relation of absolute knowing to religion. Where Hyppolite insists that absolute knowledge supersedes religious knowledge, Lauer suggests (perhaps rather optimistically) that absolute knowledge offers a new, higher, perspective in which “absolute form” is reconciled with the “absolute content” that religious thinking displays. For Lauer it is not so much supersession as elevation.

But Hyppolite’s talk of the absolute’s knowledge of itself is also nonsense in its own right, regardless of whether “the absolute” refers to God or to a Feuerbachian dignity, and regardless of whether we have supersession or elevation of “religious” thinking. Hegel simply does not talk in this way in this text.²⁸ John Burbidge offers a concise discussion of what “the absolute” does and does not mean in a range of texts by Hegel, especially in this chapter. His main point, which has the virtue of being derived textually rather than spun from external prior philosophical commitments, is that Hegel’s use of “absolute” tends to be adjectival and adverbial and not nominal. When Hegel speaks in his own voice, as he does in this chapter of the *Phenomenology*, he speaks of absolute knowing, or knowing absolutely. Hegel certainly talks of “the absolute” from time to time, but this is often not in his own voice: he is discussing Schelling’s concept. And Hegel is generally critical of it.²⁹

We can thus offer a rubric of our own: when Hegel talks of “absolute knowing” he is talking about human knowing (rather than God’s), and the adjectival qualification “absolute” indicates something that is absent from “religious” thinking and that is present in a certain kind of “philosophical” thinking. Quite what this is not explained in §793, which is perhaps why it is difficult for commentators. We have to read on.

²⁶ Ibid., pp. 596–597.

²⁷ Lauer, *A Reading*, p. 290.

²⁸ The phrase “consciousness of the absolute” can be found in the *Encyclopaedia Philosophy of Spirit*, at §556, but this appears to be a contraction of “consciousness of the absolute spirit,” and this is a formulation that itself contracts quite a sizeable portion of Hegel’s thinking in the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* rather than the *Phenomenology*.

²⁹ John Burbidge, “Absolute Knowing,” in *Hegel’s Systematic Contingency* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), pp. 70–80, esp. pp. 70–73. This is an area where even Quentin Lauer drives off-road. See my commentary on §798.

§794 concerns the convergence of two kinds of reconciliation of consciousness with self-consciousness, one stemming from the religious spirit, and one from consciousness itself.

The unification of both aspects has not yet been shown; that unification concludes this series of shapes of spirit, for within it spirit reaches the point where it knows itself not merely as it is *in itself*, that is, in terms of its absolute *content*, and not merely as it is *for itself* in terms of its contentless form, that is, in terms of the aspect of self-consciousness. Rather, it knows itself as it is *in and for itself*. (§794)

Die Vereinigung beider Seiten ist noch nicht aufgezeigt; sie ist es, welche diese Reihe der Gestaltungen des Geistes beschließt; denn in ihr kommt der Geist dazu, sich zu wissen nicht nur, wie er *an sich* oder nach seinem absoluten *Inhalte*, noch nur wie er *für sich* nach seiner inhaltslosen Form oder nach der Seite des Selbstbewußtseins, sondern wie er *an und für sich* ist. (PhG 425)

Religion presents this reconciliation in terms of an “absolute” content: God. Consciousness conceives of this reconciliation in terms of “contentless form.” The religious account places the reconciliation in the object. Consciousness places reconciliation in the subject (and becomes “self-consciousness” in the process). Hegel summarizes the peculiar vocabulary that the *Phenomenology* has developed for this kind of activity. The religious shape of consciousness has the form of “being in itself” (*An-sich-sein*). The “in itself” signifies, for Hegel, an object conceived independently of the subject. The shape of consciousness in “consciousness as such” has the form of “being for itself” (*für-sich-sein*). The “for itself” signifies reflection: the act of grasping the significance of the object for the subject – the object conceived as dependent on the subject, or how the subject takes it, we might say. The resolution of these two one-sided ways of conceiving the object is one which does justice to the objectivity of the object, and the subjectivity that (in thought) is in relation to this object. This has the form “in and for itself” (*an und für sich*). There is no great mystery about this phrase, although it sounds odd in English (where *an und für sich* is in fact a common German locution, even if used in an experimental sense here). Hegel is trying to capture the way in which two ways of conceiving the object are united; how two one-sided approaches are reconciled. The “in” and the “for” designate these two one-sided approaches, and to say “in and for” reconciles them.

This is obviously a rather formal – “logical” I would say – way of putting things. Hegel goes on in the next paragraph to flesh it out more substantially.

However, this unification has *in itself* already come to pass, even also within religion, in the return of representational thought into self-consciousness. However, it has not come to pass in terms of its proper form, for the religious aspect is the aspect of the *in-itself* which stands in contrast to the movement of self-consciousness. (§795)

Diese Vereinigung aber ist *an sich* schon geschehen, zwar auch in der Religion, in der Rückkehr der Vorstellung in das Selbstbewußtsein, aber nicht nach der eigentlichen Form, denn die religiöse Seite ist die Seite des *An-sich*, welche der Bewegung des Selbstbewußtseins gegenübersteht. (*PhG* 425)

The contrast here is between implicit and explicit expressions of the unification of two kinds of knowledge. We know from the previous paragraph that these two forms of knowledge are the objective, considered without regard for the subject (*an sich* or *Inhalt*) and the subjective, considered purely as something the subject does (*für sich* or *Form*). We also know that Hegel associates these with “immediate being” in the first case and “pure duty” in the second. Clearly a range of different philosophical problems are in view here, and we can simplify things somewhat by suggesting that Hegel is drawing a contrast between a focus on contemplation and a focus on action, and the ways these are falsely opposed in certain philosophical approaches. Finally we already know that Hegel wishes to describe an approach in which these two falsely opposed forms of knowledge are “reconciled” or “unified.” Hegel’s language for this reconciliation and unification is *an und für sich* or “spirit.”

§795 clarifies something that Hegel says often, but which is easy to miss if one is concentrating on the details rather than the bigger picture. The unification is not something peculiar to philosophy, but is already expressed in religious thinking. This must initially seem rather surprising and even mistaken, if one takes Hegel’s remarks about religion from the early parts of the *Phenomenology* as paradigmatic. In the “Unhappy Consciousness” section (especially in the discussion around §213) it appears that religious thinking takes the action of the subject and fashions from it an object, separated and alienated from the subject, something “unchangeable” that is falsely placed over against the exaggeratedly “individual” (and later “unessential”) human subject. Religious consciousness is “unhappy” because the alienated object is forever produced by the subject as something unattainable, and instead of joyfully owning its free act of knowing-as-producing as its own, it is reduced

to a complex, mournful interplay of longing and giving thanks, in which its own freedom eludes it. This, then, is Hegel's rich evocation of the sorrow (as he sees it) at the heart of Christian devotion. Christ's body is simultaneously made present, as an available and tangible thing in the world, and yet rendered absent and out of reach – deferred into an indeterminate future that never arrives. Unlike those who celebrate the anticipation of that fulfillment, above all in the feast of Corpus Christi, Hegel's account of precisely the same phenomenon – understood in some respects in the same way – is tinged with sadness. The similarity resides in the interplay of presence and absence, the body given and the body taken away. But where Hegel stands sharply at odds with the ancient and modern theological tradition is in his refusal to make *gift* the central category in his account of the relation of divine and human action. This is not some unfortunate oversight on Hegel's part: his critique of religious thinking, in this earlier section, is precisely that it treats what it freely *produces* as something alienly *received*. (It is not my purpose in this study to repair Hegel, but were one to do so, this is a good place to start: Hegel himself falsely opposes producing and receiving in his account of religious thinking, and fails to appreciate the Neoplatonic strand in Christian negative theology, in which it is explicitly recognized that human speech *says too much* – is *hyperactive* one might say – as well as insisting that the real is given, which is for Hegel such theology's only emphasis.)

It is surely the case that Hegel's philosophical project is a recovery of *freedom*, inspired by Rousseau, concerned to repair the philosophical tendency, inherited from Kant, to purify that freedom to the point of willful inaction in the messy world of compromise and contingency. And thus one might expect to find Hegel claiming that in religious thinking one finds a false opposition, and an endless oscillation, between taking an object "out there" and an obsession with the purity of the subject's "inner life."

Yet Hegel makes such a claim neither in the "Religion" chapter nor in the summary of it offered here in §795. Instead he says here that the unification between a focus on contemplation (*an sich*) and a focus on action (*für sich*), or between "content" and "form," is already discernible – "has already happened" – in religious thinking. But Hegel here plays with his terms and suggests that this unification happens *an sich* and that the reconciliation between "content" and "form" "has not come to pass in terms of its proper form." This play on terms is not just an idle game for Hegel. He is struggling to articulate a peculiar feature of the kind of philosophy he is engaged in. At one level there is a false opposition between *an sich* and *für sich*, and between "content" and "form." This plays out in various forms of everyday thinking. At a deeper level there are forms of thinking in which these false oppositions are overcome – are "unified" or "reconciled" to use Hegel's verbs. But such a deeper level can itself display a one-sided *an sich* character

or exhibit an inadequate “form.” And religious thinking is said by Hegel to be just such a display.

In other words, Hegel is claiming not that religious thinking perpetuates a false opposition between content and form, object and subject, being and thinking. Instead he claims, rather subtly, that religious thinking overcomes such false oppositions at one level, but in such a way that the reconciliation itself displays a false opposition between being and thinking. That is not an easy distinction to sustain, and its subtlety is one reason why Hegel’s critique of religious thinking is often misunderstood and overstated. Religious thinking does not lack “unification” (i.e. overcoming the false opposition between being and thinking); what it lacks is “the concept” (*der Begriff*):

The unification that is still lacking is the simple unity of the concept. This concept is also already present in the aspect of self-consciousness, but, just as it previously come before us, it has, like all the other moments, the form of a *particular shape of consciousness*. (§795)³⁰

Die Vereinigung, welche noch fehlt, ist die einfache Einheit des Begriffs. Dieser ist an der Seite des Selbstbewußtseins selbst auch schon vorhanden; aber wie er im Vorhergehenden vorgekommen, hat er, wie alle übrigen Momente die Form, eine *besondere Gestalt* des Bewußtseins zu sein. (*PhG* 425)

Even the concept is not completely absent. It is “available” (*vorhanden*) in self-consciousness, but it takes a particular form (a “shape”). Shapes of consciousness are one of Hegel’s terms of art for describing everyday kinds of thinking, in contrast to properly philosophical thinking. Everyday thinking is particular; it pictures things; it draws analogies; it narrates things in time. Philosophical thinking is universal; it handles thinkings conceptually; it is “de-tensed.”³¹ The particular shape of consciousness in question here is that of the “beautiful soul.”

Hegel’s account at this point ceases to be mere summary of previous sections, and becomes complex and technical. Close attention to the text is desirable, but it would produce a very lengthy discussion that is disproportionate to the arguments Hegel is making, and the way he makes them. I propose to take a short cut here and summarize the main points, drawing attention to certain features of the presentation.

³⁰ Pinkard’s translation reproduces the grammatical irregularity in Hegel’s original German, where *vorgekommen* lacks the *ist* that one would expect to follow it.

³¹ This phrase is Cyril O’Regan’s, from a conversation with Ian Cooper about the relation of Hegel’s concept to the poetry of Hölderlin.

Hegel's discussion of the beautiful soul comes towards the end of the "Spirit" chapter. When Hegel describes the beautiful soul he is describing a defective form of moral consciousness (§658ff.). The beautiful soul has exalted values, elevated notions, noble speech about action: but in order to preserve its purity it refuses actually to act. The beautiful soul has a great deal to say – about duty, honor, virtue, goodness, etc. etc. Action in the world threatens to sully its beautiful purity to such an extent that action itself comes to be seen as "evil." When such action becomes unavoidable, the beautiful soul has to confront its own "evil," and in so doing seeks "forgiveness," in ways that overcome both incapacitating pride (as it views itself) and heartless contempt (as it views others). More philosophically, Hegel stages this drama of the "beautiful" soul, its "evil" acts and its much-needed "forgiveness" as a narrative about the relation of contemplation to action, of thinking to being, of individual to the social, of the universal to the particular, and – in sum – the overcoming of false oppositions.

When Hegel rehearses this narrative in §§795 and 796 (which are relatively long discussions) a whole host of terms is brought into play: universality (*Allgemeinheit*), self-emptying (*Entäußerung*), essence and particularity (*Wesen . . . dies . . . dies . . .*), representational thought (*Vorstellung*), immediacy and mediation (*Unmittelbarkeit . . . das vermittelte*), being and existence in relation to essence (*Sein/Dasein* and *Wesen*), the relation of "in itself" to "for itself," acting and knowing (*Handeln* and *Wissen*). The overall effect is a concern with how the concept appears at first one-sidedly, and how this one-sidedness is eventually overcome. It is followed by a summary of the crucial issue, and this takes a very compressed form:

What in religion was *content*, that is, the form of representing an *other*, is here the *self's* own *activity*. The concept ensures that the content is that of the self's own activity. – For this concept is, as we see, the knowledge of the self's activity within itself as all essentiality and all existence, the knowledge of *this subject* as *substance* and of the substance as this knowledge of its activity. – Our sole contribution here is in part to *gather together* the individual moments, each of which in its principle exhibits the life of the whole spirit, and in part to cleave to the concept in the form of the

Was also in der Religion *Inhalt* oder Form des Vorstellens eines *Andern* war, dasselbe ist hier eignes *Tun* des *Selbsts*; der Begriff verbindet es, daß der *Inhalt* eignes *Tun* des *Selbsts* ist; – denn dieser Begriff ist, wie wir sehen, das Wissen des Tuns des Selbsts in sich als aller Wesenheit und alles Daseins, das Wissen von *diesem Subjekte* als der *Substanz*, und von der Substanz als diesem Wissen seines Tuns. – Was wir hier hinzugetan, ist allein teils die *Versammlung* der einzelnen Momente, deren jedes in seinem Prinzip das Leben des ganzen Geistes darstellt, teils das Festhalten

concept, whose content would have yielded itself in those moments and in the form of a *shape of consciousness*. (§797)³²

des Begriffes in der Form des Begriffes, dessen Inhalt sich in jenen Momenten, und der sich in der Form einer *Gestalt des Bewußtseins* schon selbst ergeben hätte. (*PhG* 427)

It is important to remember that it is a false opposition in the appearance of “the concept” that is in view here, rather than a pre-conceptual false opposition. That is, religion displays the concept in a one-sided way, rather than not at all. Characteristically, religious thinking displays things in terms of “content” rather than “form,” of “representing” rather than “concept,” of “other” rather than “self.” The reconciliations between thinking and being that the concept achieves are displayed in religious thinking, but not yet in a “conceptual” way. Religious thinking starts to overcome certain false oppositions, but it does so in a way that continues to be dogged by false oppositions; it starts to overcome certain kinds of one-sidedness, but in a one-sided way. Hegel has a particularly striking pair here: he describes the relation of thinking and being as a relation of subject and substance (textually echoing a famous claim in the Preface, although he wrote the latter after this final chapter). This is part of his Rousseauvean repair of Spinoza, whose account of substance in the *Ethics* is in Hegel’s view too mechanical and deficient in genuine freedom. To insist that the substance is subject (and vice versa) is to place freedom at the heart of being.

The important structural claim is contained in the “in part . . . in part . . .” (*teils . . . teils . . .*) construction. This contains a compressed claim about the chapter as a whole, and by extension the *Phenomenology* as a whole. In part it is a matter of gathering moments; in part it is a matter of taking the concept *conceptually*. The business of gathering is one of Hegel’s most important philosophical contributions. It is a matter of taking various phenomena which are extended in time – which are narrated, we might say – and rendering them synoptically – “all at once.” In everyday thinking they appear in a temporal sequence. In philosophy they are taken without tense. The concept is Hegel’s logical tool for overcoming false oppositions, such as between being and thinking. Such false oppositions can be overcome in representational forms, such as religious thinking. But in philosophy they are taken “conceptually” (*in der Form des Begriffes*). Explaining what Hegel means by this is a challenge, because explanation of philosophical arguments most characteristically means rendering highly abstract formulations in more everyday images, often through the use of analogies. But what Hegel is trying to get at here is that philosophical thinking is the refusal of images,

³² Final part of paragraph retranslated by Nicholas Walker.

and the rejection of analogy. To try to find suitable images and analogies to explain what Hegel is doing rather defeats his purpose. We can say, however, that there are two senses of “concept” at work in this paragraph. In the first sense, or at the first level, “the concept” means the overcoming of false oppositions of various kinds. In the second sense, or at a deeper level, “the concept” means a shift from picturing things, in an everyday kind of way, to formalizing them, in a technical philosophical way. Thus when Hegel uses the odd phrase “cleave to the concept in the form of the concept” he is relating these two senses to each other: the task is to overcome false oppositions in a way that renders that overcoming in a non-pictured and de-tensed way. Putting things this way can help explain how Hegel can so cheerfully say that religious thinking has a conceptual content, but not a conceptual form. It overcomes false oppositions, but it does so through everyday picture-thinking, and in a way that preserves a one-sided emphasis on “the other” at the expense of “the self,” instead of overcoming this false opposition. (Given that “the other” is God, we will want to consider how desirable it is to overcome the alleged false opposition between “the other” and the “self” in the final part of this chapter.)

§798 marks an important shift of gear. The sections up until §797 are a rehearsal of the forms of thinking that concern previous chapters of the *Phenomenology* and summarize the main intellectual moves. The strong continuities with previous chapters, and especially the “Religion” chapter, are prominent. §798 offers a discussion, for the first time in this chapter, of what “absolute knowing” might be and begins the crucial articulation of the discontinuities with the previous “Religion” chapter that mark out “absolute knowing” as something other than religious thinking.

This last shape of spirit is that of absolute knowing, that is, the spirit which at the same time gives to its complete and true content the form of the self, and which precisely as a result realizes its concept as much as it persists within this realization within its concept. It is spirit knowing itself in the shape of spirit, that is, it is *comprehending conceptual knowing*. (§798)

Diese letzte Gestalt des Geistes, der Geist, der seinem vollständigen und wahren Inhalte zugleich die Form des Selbsts gibt, und dadurch seinen Begriff ebenso realisiert, als er in dieser Realisierung in seinem Begriffe bleibt, ist das absolute Wissen; es ist der sich in Geistsgestalt wissende Geist oder das *begreifende Wissen*. (PhG 427)

I have amended Pinkard’s translation and rendered *Wissen* here (and on every occasion) as “knowing” rather than “knowledge” in order to draw attention to the act, rather than the content, that Hegel seeks to describe.

The chapter is not, in my view, concerned with knowledge in the sense in which we normally use that word. There is no special epistemological content that is finally revealed in this chapter. As Hyppolite rightly points out, this chapter's concerns are logical more than epistemological.³³

This sentence is rather grand, and in the German Hegel reserves the central idea until the end of the first clause – absolute knowing is revealed with a flourish after a portentous build-up. Like so much of this chapter, it is compressed. The central terms are “spirit” and “concept,” and the most important task is to discern how they are related to each other here. I suggested earlier that the term “spirit” for Hegel is intended to signal that the false opposition between individual and community has been overcome. Likewise the term “concept” signals that the false opposition between thinking and being (or subject and object) has been overcome. These concerns appeared right at the start of §788, and they reappear here. What was stated in §788 as a criticism of religious thinking as “not yet” overcoming its own one-sidedness is here stated as something that is finally achieved.

The first part is convoluted, especially in English. There are evidently two further ideas in play, in addition to spirit and concept: “the form of the self” and “realization.” Translating directly into English is difficult, so a paraphrase is a better bet. We can unravel it as follows. We are dealing with spirit. More particularly, we are dealing with its complete and true content. This has three features, and the structure of the clauses which specify them is governed by *zugleich . . . dadurch . . . als*. They are: (1) it gives the form of the self; (2) it therefore realizes its concept; (3) furthermore in this realization it remains in its concept. “The form of the self” seems to be a reference to subjectivity. Spirit is not viewed here from the outside, as it were, but as something which is a self, or rather, gives the *form* of the self. I take it that Hegel wants to indicate *how* it acts rather than *what* it is. It acts as a self. To say “it realizes its concept” is to suggest, perhaps, that something that was merely implicit has been made explicit. Or, in an Aristotelian register, what was *dunamis* is now *energeia*: it is actual, and not just potential. The reference to “concept” qualifies “the form of the self.” The latter, by itself, might imply something one-sidedly subjective; if it “realizes its concept,” then such one-sidedness is overcome. The relation between thinking and being, between subject and object, is a properly reciprocal one. Finally, this realization is not a temporary state of affairs that is about to change: to realize its concept means to remain in this state of realization. We are thus not dealing with a shape of spirit like previous shapes, which pass from one form to another. This shape arrives at a particular point and stays there:

³³ Hyppolite, *Genesis and Structure*, pp. 574–575.

indeed to arrive at this point *is* to stay there. Put negatively, if it does not stay there, it has not really arrived that this point.

What point is that? It is “spirit knowing itself in the shape of spirit,” which can also be described as *begreifende Wissen*. This works in German, but not so readily in English. The German word for concept, *Begriff*, is here rendered in verbal form: *begreifen*. The root meaning of this is “to grasp,” in the sense of understand (although it can also in many cases be freely substituted for *greifen*, which means physically to grasp something). A concept, in German, is a frozen grasp, just as it is in English and French, if one traces concept back to the Latin *concupio* and ultimately *capio*. Hegel can unfreeze *Begriff* into *begreifen* in a way that his English translator cannot unfreeze concept into a verbal form. (One could try “conceive,” but it doesn’t really work. In everyday speech English uses an auxiliary verb: we do not say “you do not conceive politeness” but “you have no concept of politeness”! “Knowing which has a concept” is hardly idiomatic.) But even if we cannot translate it, by now we can grasp its meaning.

This section is one of the few where even Quentin Lauer, in his lucid and readable commentary on the *Phenomenology*, departs from the text and attributes to Hegel views, and even phrases, that are not his. In his comments on §798 he says

Where the *knowing* is absolute, the *spirit* knowing is absolute; and only a spirit which “comprehends the absolute” is itself absolute: “It is spirit knowing itself in the form of spirit, i.e., *comprehensive (begreifende) knowing*” . . . There are, of course, those who will dispute that by “consciousness of the absolute” Hegel means “consciousness of God,” but since it is difficult to see what else “comprehending the absolute” could mean, it seems safe to say that in some significant sense he means that self-consciousness and God-consciousness are identified in absolute knowing.³⁴

It is difficult to know how to interpret this. Lauer places “comprehends the absolute” in inverted commas, indicating that it is a quotation; when he refers back to it, it has become “consciousness of the absolute,” again in a way that looks like a quotation. Hegel does not say either “comprehends the absolute” or “consciousness of the absolute” in this paragraph, and (as I have made clear earlier in §793) it is a mistake to think that by “absolute knowing” Hegel describes anything other than a way in which humans know. But furthermore he is not describing a thing, called the absolute, that can be known. Lauer is a generally reliable commentator, however, and it is

³⁴ Lauer, *A Reading*, pp. 292–293.

uncharacteristic of him simply to make things up. The best explanation I can offer is that he is thinking of the *Encyclopaedia* or of the *Phenomenology's* Preface, which contains a great deal about "the absolute," especially in its earlier paragraphs, including the following:

what is at one time called intuition and at another time called either the immediate knowledge of the absolute, or religion, or being... (§6)	was bald Anschauung, bald unmittelbares Wissen des Absoluten, Religion, das Sein... genannt wird... (<i>PhG</i> 12)
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Lauer might also be recalling the opening section of "The Enlightenment Struggle Against Superstition":

... pure insight is born from the substance, and it both knows the pure <i>self</i> of consciousness to be absolute, and it incorporates that self into the pure consciousness of the absolute essence of all actuality. (§541)	... [reine Einsicht] ist aus der Substanz geboren, weiß das reine <i>Selbst</i> des Bewußtseins als absolut, und nimmt es mit dem reinen Bewußtsein des absoluten Wesens aller Wirklichkeit auf. (<i>PhG</i> 293)
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It would take us too far afield from the current chapter to interpret this material from earlier sections; it must suffice to observe that in the Preface Hegel is rather critical of a tendency to make claims about God and the absolute (especially in an extended critique in §23), and that in the discussion of the Enlightenment in §541 he sees "consciousness of the absolute essence" as a feature of the one-sided and highly problematic phenomenon of "pure insight," and certainly not something displayed by absolute knowing. Lauer seems confused, or at least textually muddled, and his claims here must be rejected.

To return to Hegel's text, this final shape of spirit is absolute knowing, a shape which is complete and true. We can unpack such knowing in a way that draws attention to how it acts as a self, and achieves a form of thinking which overcomes the false opposition between thinking and being. And once it achieves this, it has no further transformations ahead of it: it cannot be surpassed. *It is Chalcedonian thinking.*

The Johannine theme of truth is prominent here, and Hegel goes on to spell it out a little:

Here *truth* is not only *in itself* completely the same as *certainty*, but it also has the *shape* of self-certainty, that is, it is in its existence, which is to say, for the knowing spirit, in the *form* of knowing itself. Truth is the *content*, which in religion is not as yet the same as its certainty.

However, this selfsameness consists in the content receiving the shape of the self. As a result, what has come to be the element of existence, that is, the *form of objectivity*, is for consciousness what the essence itself is, namely, the *concept*. Spirit, *appearing* to consciousness within this element, or, what amounts to the same thing here, what is therein engendered by it, *is science*. (§798)

Die *Wahrheit* ist nicht nur *an sich* vollkommen der *Gewißheit* gleich, sondern hat auch die *Gestalt* der *Gewißheit* seiner selbst, oder sie ist in ihrem Dasein, das heißt, für den wissenden Geist in der *Form* des Wissens seiner selbst. Die *Wahrheit* ist der *Inhalt*, der in der Religion seiner *Gewißheit* noch ungleich ist. Diese Gleichheit aber ist darin, daß der Inhalt die Gestalt des Selbsts erhalten. Dadurch ist dasjenige zum Elemente des Daseins oder zur *Form der Gegenständlichkeit* für das Bewußtsein geworden, was das Wesen selbst ist; nämlich der *Begriff*. Der Geist in diesem Elemente dem Bewußtsein *erscheinend*, oder was hier dasselbe ist, darin von ihm hervorgebracht, *ist die Wissenschaft*. (PhG 427–428)

We have here (a) “truth” and “certainty,” (b) “form” and “content,” (c) “objectivity” and “concept,” (d) “appearing” and “engendering.” I have identified these as pairs in order to draw attention to the way Hegel thinks about the issues laid out here. We are not dealing with one thing and then another, in each case, but with two things that together structure a thought. A pair is not primarily two things, but distinct terms whose meaning derives from their relation to each other. We should take each pair in turn.

(a) Truth and certainty together embrace how things are (truth), and how a subject takes things to be (certainty). When how things are and how I take things to be are considered as a pair, then (to take up a Platonic idiom) we are firmly in the realm of *noesis* and not just *doxa*, of knowledge and not merely justified belief. But Hegel’s interest (like Plato’s) is not merely epistemological. We are not dealing with whether I have reliable cognition about this or that. We are dealing with a much deeper question: what kind of knowing do I have, when truth and certainty are a pair? In pre-Kantian philosophy the answer to this is that some kind of divinely given harmony

between thinking and being is secured. The quest for such certainty can take many forms, such as the indubitability of the cogito, the infallibility of the pope, or the inerrancy of scripture. They suffer from the same root problem: they produce “certainty” in Hegel’s sense, but they merely assert and do not guarantee a connection to the truth. Certainty, for Hegel, means thinking you have the truth, in the same way that for Kant an “objective judgment” is a truth claim about an object. In neither case is there any guarantee of truth: there is only its possibility. One might also say that “certainty” in Hegel’s sense means “lacking doubt.” This is most obvious in the early part of the *Phenomenology* where “sense certainty” turns out to be riddled with problems. In absolute knowing, however, truth coincides with certainty, and in two ways. First, it is “in itself” completely the same as certainty; second, it has the shape of “self-certainty.” These two ways are not one thing and then another: they are a pair. The “in itself” concerns the object, considered independently of the subject; the “self” concerns the subject, and its understanding that every object is an object because it counts as an object for the self. When the false oppositions between subject and object, thinking and being, are overcome, the opposition between “truth” (which is “out there”) and “certainty” (which is “in here”) is likewise overcome.

Does Hegel mean that the end product of the *Phenomenology* is the dissolution of doubt, and the achievement of an identity between what I think and how things are? If he does, then it must be admitted that the *Phenomenology of Spirit* is a strange route to get there. It must also be admitted that Hegel’s thoroughgoing critique of immediacy makes no sense, because an identity between what I think and how things are would surely be the quintessence of immediacy. We should assume, then, that Hegel does not mean this. The chapter on “Absolute Knowing” has almost nothing to say about cognition or epistemology, a fact which perplexes and should perplex those who read it. But it has a great deal to say – or perhaps show – about logic. There are three things that absolute knowing is *not* about:

- (1) “the absolute” knowing something;
- (2) knowing something called “the absolute”;
- (3) knowing “something” absolutely.

Absolute knowing is about the right relation between thinking and being. In any form of knowing short of absolute knowing, there is a false opposition or a false reconciliation between thinking and being. In skepticism there is a false opposition; in Kantian critical philosophy (read through a Fichtean lens) there is a false reconciliation on the side of the subject. Any account in which the object is treated without considering its relation to the free subject, or in which the subject is treated without considering the

objective (and messy) theater in which it acts, is deficient for Hegel. Absolute knowing does not tell the philosopher anything about the reliability or otherwise of any particular specimen of knowledge. But it does offer the most sophisticated (and indeed perfectly adequate) account of what knowing is: namely, an act which is not plagued by false oppositions, in which pairs like subject/object, thinking/being, self/other, individual/community, and man/God (most controversially) are taken precisely as pairs, and not as separate and opposed terms. In a nutshell, absolute knowing means thinking through pairs. In the context of this way of thinking, truth means dealing with the pair in-itself/self.

(b) Form and content here refer to the pair self/other. The form of knowing is a form of self-knowing. Knowing the object is always in relation to knowing the self. "Form" refers to the "self" in this pair. The content of knowing is "truth," and thus refers to the "other" in this pair. But because they are a pair, the task is not to connect "truth" (out there) to self (in here): indeed no such connection is possible, for Hegel, once such terms have been opposed. The task is to discern the ways in which self and other are inseparably in relation to each other. Hegel performs this relation in phrases like "the content receiving the shape of the self" or "the form of objectivity is for consciousness what the essence itself is." If one tries to cash these phrases out in terms of items of knowledge, they just look ridiculous. It is much better to think about rival philosophical frameworks, such as Kant's and Fichte's. For Kant, in the first *Critique*, there is sensible intuition combined with concepts. Sensible intuition comes from "being" and concepts come from "thinking." In judgment these two separate terms are combined. For Hegel it is commendable that Kant wishes to overcome the separation, but the entire attempt presupposes and accepts their (false) opposition. Fichte's "I" posits (*setzt*) the object. Thinking produces being. Again, it is commendable that Fichte seeks to overcome the false opposition of thinking and being, but he does so in a way that one-sidedly privileges thinking. The thing to notice about these examples, and this discussion, is that we are not dealing with particular nuggets of knowledge. We are considering ways of relating thinking and being. Obscure phrases like "the form of objectivity is for consciousness what the essence itself is" is, for Hegel, a way of talking about the relation of thinking and being. We might paraphrase it as "you can't talk about objectivity without talking about how the subject relates to the object." Or, as I keep repeating, "subject/object" and "thinking/being" are pairs. Words like "consciousness" (*Bewußtsein*) and "essence" (*Wesen*) are explicitly "thinking" and "being" words for Hegel. The point of his phrases is not to produce a deduction from premises, but to arrange terms as pairs – to mix them up, one might say. I would put it more strongly, however: once the reader has grasped that thinking/being is a pair, there is no further or deeper insight to be gained. The rest is a matter of exploring

what implications this has for a range of philosophical problems, above all the question of “knowing.”

Objectivity and concept is a particularly dear and intimate pair for Hegel. Again, any philosophical approach which separates them (even if it then tries to combine them) is flawed, for Hegel. Hegel is here interested in the “form” of objectivity, which we might gloss as the “way” it is handled in human knowing. And it is no surprise, by this time, to discover that for Hegel it is a “conceptual” matter. Objectivity/subjectivity are a pair, and the “concept” is shorthand for taking them as a pair. Once this has been grasped, there is no further secret to be discovered, no deeper mystery to be solved: it is a matter of investigating its implications. It is thus vitally important not to take Hegel to be saying that objectivity “boils down to” the concept, or that objectivity “can be reduced to” the concept or any other formulation that is manifestly one-sided. If one takes “concepts” (as Kant does) to be matters of subjectivity, then the game is over. Readers of Hegel who have a strongly Kantian framework for handling terms like “concept” are very likely to get Hegel wrong, for this reason. It is thus important to recognize that Hegel’s entire handling of “concept” is an explicit and thoroughgoing critique of Kant’s one-sidedness on this issue. Concepts are just as much objective as subjective, for Hegel.

Appearing and engendering is a rather less familiar pair. Hegel says “Spirit, *appearing* to consciousness within this element, or, what amounts to the same thing here, what is therein engendered by it, *is science*.” This element refers back to the sentence before, where “the element of existence” is “the concept.” In the final sentence of this paragraph, the challenge is to determine what “it” refers to. It could refer to “element” or it could refer to “consciousness”: the grammar seems to permit either. We can try out both. (1) spirit appears to consciousness = spirit is engendered by consciousness; (2) spirit appears in this element = spirit is engendered by this element; and because “this element” is “the concept” we can try out a variant of this second claim: (2) spirit appears in the concept = spirit is engendered by the concept.

I do not think it is possible to decide this: each claim can be read in a way that is consonant with Hegel’s deep interest in pairs. The main thing is that “appearing” seems to be associated with “being” and “engendering” seems to be associated with “thinking.” So long as these are taken as a pair, the proper consequence is given: science (*Wissenschaft* – the craft of knowing) is a matter of taking appearing and engendering as a pair. This is an often noted feature of Hegel’s account of knowing: that knowledge is freely produced by the subject, as much as it is received from the object. Poor-quality interpretations of Hegel on this point pit these against each other as false oppositions: “knowledge is freely produced, not passively received.” But Hegel is careful not to do this. In the current context he

says, more subtly, that if one is going to talk of spirit appearing, as if it is something received, one can just as well talk of spirit being engendered, as if it is something produced.

It hardly needs saying, but Hegel does not mean by “science” (*Wissenschaft*) what we normally mean by the term, and certainly not what is meant by the term in English (where it is an abbreviated form of “natural science,” and excludes such enterprises as philosophy). Hegel does not much explore the meaning of *Wissenschaft* in this chapter; but he does call his next major philosophical work *Wissenschaft der Logik*, which gives more than a clue as to how he understands the term. For most twenty-first-century readers of this chapter, however, the best translation of *Wissenschaft* is probably simply “philosophy.”

§799 takes an intentionally retrograde step. Where §798 reaches a kind of climax with a discussion of spirit, §799 considers how this plays out in then-contemporary philosophy, particularly with its concern with the I (*das Ich*):

The nature, moments, and movement of this knowledge have thus turned out to be such that this knowledge is the pure *being-for-itself* of self-consciousness; it is the I, which is *this I* and no other, and it is just as much the immediately *mediated*, that is, the sublated, *universal I*. (§799)

Die Natur, Momente und Bewegung dieses Wissens hat sich also so ergeben, daß es das reine *Für-sich-sein* des Selbstbewußtseins ist; es ist Ich, das *dieses* und kein anderes *Ich* und das ebenso unmittelbar *vermittelt* oder aufgehobenes *allgemeines Ich* ist. (*PhG* 428)

Hegel makes clear that “spirit” is a way of speaking of an I that is a we, and a we that is an I. Here, we consider a form of thinking in which the I is an I, and no more. Philosophy becomes an account of self-consciousness. The provocative phrase “immediately mediated” draws attention to the promise and the problem of this way of thinking. The I is the one through which all knowledge is mediated, but because there is no other involved, this amounts to a certain kind of immediacy. The sentence as a whole does not explain anything: it serves primarily to introduce the I as a topic, and to emphasize the independence, and lack of external reference, of that I.

The remainder of this paragraph explores a single facet of this focus on the I. Any content that can be known appears in consciousness. Such consciousness makes distinctions, within consciousness, between what is itself and what is other than itself. This is not just negation, the negation of the I, but “pure negativity,” because the entire theater of knowing is within the I. Consciousness is thus self-estrangement, but it never exits the internal theater of the I. What is taken to be other is always taken to be the other by

the I, within the consciousness of the I. There is no outside. Many people take this to be Hegel's view, but it is clear from this paragraph that Hegel is describing a problematic view to which he plans to offer an alternative.

§800 adds to this analysis a focus on one particular event in the cognitive life of such a subject: the moment when "spirit has come round to itself as being this consciousness about itself." That is, the I does not only produce its objects, including objects that it takes to be other than itself, but comes to understand that it is doing this. It takes its consciousness to be self-consciousness. Hegel refers to this as work (*Arbeit*). It is thus not an automatic form of self-understanding, but comes about after "compelling" (*bezwingen*) its shapes of consciousness to coalesce into this particular shape, and "aligning" (or balancing or leveling – *ausgleichen*) its self-consciousness and its consciousness. Hegel suggests that while this spirit is "distinguished into its moments" (*in seinen Momenten unterschieden*), it has not yet arrived at "substance": it "is not in itself absolute knowing" (*nicht an sich selbst absolutes Wissen*). To sum up: the achievement in this shape of spirit is significant: it grasps that its consciousness is self-consciousness. But because it is only "for itself" (*fürsichseindes Wissen*), it is not yet absolute knowing. The missing dimension is the relation of "for itself" to the now-neglected "in-itself." The implication is that the mere alignment of consciousness and self-consciousness is not enough. I suggest that Hegel means that a false opposition between the two persists in this shape of consciousness, which can be seen precisely in the need to "align" the opposed terms. Overcoming this false opposition will entail something other (and deeper) than mere alignment.

§801 begins the process of integrating these various terms, the most important being the relations between substance and subject, and between consciousness and self-consciousness. Hegel is engaged here in an ambitious repair of several strands in the philosophical tradition, and the phrase-lengths, so to speak, become longer – building up to the extraordinary and dazzling display of §803. Broadly speaking, substance language signals an engagement with Spinoza's radical revision of the scholastic Aristotelian tradition; subject language indicates an engagement with Kant's so-called "Copernican turn"; consciousness and self-consciousness language displays a concern with Descartes' legacy, read through Fichte's radical revision of Kant's critical philosophy. Clearly, there is a lot going on in a series of paragraphs in which these terms come into play in relation to each other.

Now, in actuality the knowing substance exists there earlier than the form, that is, the shape of the concept. (§801)

In der Wirklichkeit ist nun die wissende Substanz früher da als die Form oder Begriffsgestalt derselben. (*PhG* 428)

This is a familiar refrain in this chapter: the achievement of absolute knowing is distinguished not by its content, but by its form. The “knowing substance” is present in religion, in the previous chapter, for example; but it does not recognize itself as such. The three principal terms here are “substance,” “form” (or “shape”), and “concept.” Substance, in Spinoza’s *Ethics*, is the unity of which all reality is composed, and in which all beings participate. But it is curiously inorganic, icily indifferent, utterly determined, in Hegel’s view. Hegel’s account of substance is married to the Kantian subject, which is pregnant with intention, glorious in its reason, magnificent in its freedom (although humanity is also “crooked timber” and, in later work, afflicted with a propensity towards “radical evil”).³⁵ To be a *knowing* substance (echoing the title of this chapter) is to endow substance with freedom and reason. To speak of “form” and “shape” is to draw attention not only to *what* it is, but *how* it appears – and to appear as “the concept” is for it to be “gathered,” to use the language of §789, to be thought formally, rather than pictured narratively.

For the substance is the still undeveloped *in-itself*, that is, the ground and concept in its still unmoved simplicity, and it is therefore the *inwardness*, that is, the self of spirit which does not yet *exist there*. What does *exist there* is the still undeveloped “simple” and “immediate,” that is, the object of *representational* consciousness per se. (§801)

Denn die Substanz ist das noch unentwickelte *Ansich* oder der Grund und Begriff in seiner noch unbewegten Einfachheit, also die *Innerlichkeit* oder das Selbst des Geistes, das noch nicht *da ist*. Was *da ist*, ist als das noch unentwickelte Einfache und Unmittelbare, oder der Gegenstand des *vorstellenden* Bewußtseins überhaupt. (*PhG* 428)

These two sentences develop the basic claim. The substance (Hegel retains the singularity of Spinoza’s term) appears, in this incomplete shape, as an object and not a subject. Subject and object are here conceived in false opposition. Words like “in itself,” “inwardness,” “simple,” and “immediate” signify this one-sided approach to the object. Hegel plays on *Dasein* (normally translated by Pinkard as “existence”), meaning being in the world, with the verbal form *da ist*. The term “self of spirit” signifies a reflexive, subjective aspect – precisely the kind of *für sich* orientation that is absent in this *an sich* being. In that sense, the “self of spirit” does not “exist there”; we might say “is no *Dasein*.” To “be in the world” as a self, it would need to be a subject, and not just an object. And to make explicit its lack of *conceptual* shape

³⁵ I am grateful to Nicholas Walker for this observation.

(i.e. its failure to show itself a formal, philosophically conceived being), it is an object of “representational” (*vorstellend*) consciousness. Representational thinking, sometimes translated as picture-thinking, is the pinnacle of religious thought, which conceives God as an object, over and against the human subject, in narrative, concrete terms. Hegel does not mean that all religious thinkers think like this – he finds Anselm’s ontological argument to be a compelling model for what he calls “conceptual” thinking, for example – but that everyday religious life displays forms of thinking of this representational kind. Hegel does not think that representational thinking is false, but that it is the product of a false opposition between thinking and being: its object is conceived without proper consideration of its relation to the subject. The more emphatic the opposition between subject and object, the more remote the object becomes from the subject, and the more hopeless the measures (however intense) by theologians and philosophers to bridge the gap. For Hegel, attempts to bridge are evidence of a prior tendency to produce or presuppose the gap. The alternative is to refuse the false opposition, and to try to think through the implications of a view in which subject and object are distinct but in inseparable relation. In more Platonic language, the alternative is a more *participative* logic, in which subject and object are mutually involved, while preserving their distinctness.

Because it is spiritual consciousness, cognition is that to which what exists *in itself* is only in so far as it is a *being for the self* and a being of the *self*, that is, a concept. For this reason cognition initially has only a meager object in contrast to which the substance and the consciousness of this substance are richer. (§801)

Das Erkennen, weil es das geistige Bewußtsein ist, dem, was *an sich* ist, nur insofern ist, als es *Sein für* das *Selbst* und Sein des *Selbstes* oder Begriff ist, hat aus diesem Grunde zuerst nur einen armen Gegenstand, gegen welchen die Substanz und deren Bewußtsein reicher ist. (*PhG* 428)

There are two relatively straightforward ideas here. First, the “spiritual” is explicitly tied to the “conceptual”: consciousness characterized by spirit produces a form of thought in which what is *an sich* (a focus on being) is simultaneously *für sich* (a focus on thinking); overcoming this false opposition is what is meant by “concept.” Second, the kind of object which appears initially (i.e. before the turn to the subject, and then the turn to a right relation between subject and object) is rather thin, whereas the more developed forms of thinking produce an account of substance that is richer.

The revealedness which the substance has in this consciousness is in fact concealment, for the substance is the still *selfless being*, and only the certainty of itself is revealed to it. (§801)

Die Offenbarkeit, die sie in diesem hat, ist in der Tat Verborgenheit, denn sie ist das noch *selbstlose Sein*, und offenbar ist sich nur die Gewißheit seiner selbst. (*PhG* 428)

Hegel here might be thought to be bringing the discussion more explicitly into questions of religious thinking in his talk of “revealedness,” but if so it is not an everyday kind of religious thinking because it concerns “the substance,” which is a Spinozist idiom. The main point seems to be to draw out one implication of this relatively undeveloped form of consciousness: that what is apparently *revealed* (the object) is in fact just as much a *concealed* subject – which remains buried and hidden in the object, which is viewed as a purely external being over and against the subject. The being is “selfless” in the sense that it fails to take account of its selfhood in its orientation to the object. The phrase about “the certainty of itself” is rather obscure in this context. It is presumably a very compressed reference to the earlier section in the *Phenomenology*, “the truth of self-certainty,” which marks the transition from consciousness to self-consciousness. Here it perhaps stands merely to signal that this transition is in view.

The next part of this paragraph, up until the discussion of time, serves to reinforce the themes already in play. It is the transition from “in itself” to “for itself,” from a concern with a seemingly immediate object (which turns out not to be immediate) to a concern with the mediating subject (which turns out to be one-sided). It is worth noting in passing that for Hegel the self is one of the objects of consciousness and that self-consciousness marks a phase of thinking in which it ceases to be an object that can be considered in a detached way, and becomes more integrated into the entire field of cognition.

The discussion of time which concludes this paragraph serves to make two bold claims, which go to the heart of why Hegel is difficult to understand and explain. The first is that in its earlier shapes, spirit appears in a temporal fashion, even in quite sophisticated accounts such as those in which time is represented as “empty intuition” (which is presumably a reference to Kant). The second is that spirit only appears in such a temporal fashion so long as it fails to “grasp its pure concept”:

Consequently, spirit necessarily appears in time, and it appears in time as long as it does not *grasp* its pure concept, which is to say, as long as it does not annul time. (§801)

deswegen erscheint der Geist notwendig in der Zeit, und er erscheint so lange in der Zeit, als er nicht seinen reinen Begriff *erfaßt*, das heißt, nicht die Zeit tilgt. (*PhG* 429)

This is an extraordinary claim, and one that can easily be misunderstood as one that sets Hegel's conception of philosophy, or at least of absolute knowing, sharply at odds with the theological tradition. The plain sense of this claim, if we render it in positive rather than negative terms, is that when spirit grasps its pure concept it will not appear in time, and indeed will annul (*tilgen*) time. This is a potential theological problem because it seems to deny the temporality of human life, and seems to imply that absolute knowing will be a matter of doing away with time itself. This would be a bold and bizarre claim, and one that seems largely unrelated to the rest of the chapter and its claims. I think that Hegel's concerns are more limited and less exciting than that. It is probably more plausible to interpret this clause as a claim about the successive nature of everyday human cognition (a form of cognition that persists, even for philosophers) and the contrast with absolute knowing (a specialized form of thinking reserved only to philosophy) which is not successive and temporal, but which "gathers" shapes and structures them in a non-temporal way. Hegel was an amateur mineralogist at the time he wrote the *Phenomenology*, and it is perhaps appropriate to suggest that absolute knowing is a bit like viewing the historical record as exhibited by strata – seen all at once, in a non-temporal way. When spirit is "consummated" (*vollendet*) the temporal flow is taken up into a form of thinking which is no longer temporal, in the same way that a curve on a graph non-temporally expresses acceleration, or notation on a musical score expresses rhythm. There comes a point when philosophy can take account of a way of thinking, peculiar to philosophy, when the temporal picture-thinking that characterizes everyday cognition can be represented and made sense of as a graph or a score. The relation between thinking and being, between subject and object, can likewise be conceived without an oscillation between the two terms, without a focus of one then the other, but in a synoptic, formal, "de-tensed" fashion. If this is a plausible interpretation, then Hegel's remarks about time are not quite as odd as they might first appear, but are attempts to get at the "de-tensed" quality of absolute knowing.

§802 shows a more definite interest in the forms of thinking displayed in religious life, and Hegel here tries to identify more precisely the ways in which absolute knowing is different from religious thinking. Before getting into some of the details it is important to note that Hegel is not offering a critique of religious thinking with a view to rejecting it. He is consistently clear that everyday representational thinking is the normal way in which people (including philosophers) consider the world around them. Absolute knowing is not an orientation that can be readily sustained in ordinary life, and it is certainly not a form of everyday thinking that supplants religious thinking. (This is, however, an area where Hegel displays contrary tendencies, some of which we shall see in §808 when Hegel talks about absolute

knowing as a form of life, and not just an available logic.) It is worth pointing out, for emphasis, that religious people who speak of God as a determinate object, over and against the subject, and anti-religious people, who insist that such a God is superstitious nonsense, are alike practitioners of what Hegel calls religious thinking. They share an account of the object whose logic is governed by a false opposition between subject and object, thinking and being. The “new atheists” are just as “religious” in Hegel’s sense as the most fervent evangelical Christian. Their arguments are rendered insignificant by a turn to absolute knowing. The whole paragraph is important, and we will take each part in turn.

For this reason, it must be said that nothing is *known* that is not in *experience*, or, as it can be otherwise expressed, nothing is *known* that is not available as *felt truth*, as *the eternal which is inwardly revealed*, as the holy which is the object of *faith*, or whatever other expressions are employed. For experience consists in precisely this, namely, that the content – and the content is spirit – exists *in itself*, is substance and is therefore the *object* of *consciousness*. (§802)

Es muß aus diesem Grunde gesagt werden, daß nichts *gewußt* wird, was nicht in der *Erfahrung* ist, oder, wie dasselbe auch ausgedrückt wird, was nicht als *gefühlte Wahrheit*, als *innerlich geoffenbartes Ewiges*, als *gegläubtes Heiliges*, oder welche Ausdrücke sonst gebraucht werden, vorhanden ist. Denn die Erfahrung ist eben dies, daß der Inhalt – und er ist der Geist – *an sich*, Substanz und also *Gegenstand* des *Bewußtseins* ist. (*PhG* 429)

This claim concerns religious thinking. It is very carefully structured. First, Hegel articulates the cognitive rule articulated by Kant in the *Critique of Pure Reason*: “nothing is known that is not in experience.” The religious thinking under consideration will seek to obey this rule. Kant himself proposed a rubric for knowledge of God: he suggested that God is an “idea of reason” and thus cannot be known. The religious thinking under consideration rejects this rubric, because it flatly contradicts important aspects of religious faith, but it accepts the rule that “nothing is known that is not in experience.” It must thus propose an alternative rubric for knowledge of God. Second, then, Hegel offers three versions of such alternative rubrics: “felt truth,” “inwardly revealed eternal,” and “the holy as an object of faith.” Hegel does not attach these rubrics to any particular thinkers: we might recognize Schleiermacher’s proposals in the *Speeches* in the reference to “felt truth” or Jacobi’s proposals in *David Hume* in the reference to “object of faith.” But Hegel is not concerned to engage these textually, or as part of the history of ideas, but solely as available rubrics that show up

in a variety of forms of religious thinking. His accounts of these rubrics are much less compelling if they are too closely tied to particular thinkers, in my view. Third, Hegel draws attention to the logic that governs these alternative rubrics: they produce an object that is over and against the subject (this is what “in itself” signifies, for Hegel), and this object appears in consciousness, in a way that fails to do justice to self-consciousness (the “for itself” which will come into play a little later in this paragraph).

The claim articulated here can be summarized: forms of religious thinking that reject Kant’s rubric for knowing God, but accept his rule that “nothing is known that is not in experience” are forced to produce an alternative rubric in which God is an object of experience. Such a rubric will be governed by a logic of opposition, in which thinking and being, subject and object, are falsely opposed. But even though it does this, it still does genuinely have to do with spirit; it is just that this is only “content” (with the implication that it does not yet extend to “form”).

However, this substance, which is spirit, is its *coming-to-be* what it, the substance, is *in itself*; and it is as this coming-to-be which is taking a reflective turn into itself that spirit is truly in itself *spirit*. Spirit is in itself the movement which is cognition – the transformation of that former *in-itself* into *for-itself*, of *substance* into *subject*, of the object of *consciousness* into the object of *self-consciousness*, i.e., into an object that is just as much sublated, that is, into the *concept*. (§802)

Diese Substanz aber, die der Geist ist, ist das *Werden* seiner zu dem, was er *an sich* ist; und erst als dies sich in sich reflektierende *Werden* ist er an sich in Wahrheit *der Geist*. Er ist an sich die Bewegung, die das Erkennen ist, – die Verwandlung jenes *Ansichs* in das *Für-sich*, der *Substanz* in das *Subjekt*, des Gegenstands des *Bewußtseins* in Gegenstand des *Selbstbewußtseins*, d.h. in ebensosehr aufgehobnen Gegenstand, oder in den *Begriff*. (*PhG* 429)

This is a rather compressed set of claims, but they discharge a familiar task: to narrate the movement of a view of substance “in itself” (i.e. when considered in a framework where subject is opposed to object) to one where it is seen as “for itself” (i.e. when the governing framework is one where subject is integral to how the object is conceived). In such a transformation (*Verwandlung*) the substance becomes subject, and appears as an object of self-consciousness rather than an object of consciousness. This should all be rather familiar by now. We can notice, in passing, that Hegel speaks of the substance as in a process of coming-to-be (*das Werden*). Unlike Spinoza’s

fixed and immutable substance, as Hegel sees it, we are dealing with something that develops. The “sublated object” is “the concept.” This is also a familiar theme at this point: once self-consciousness is taken seriously in one’s account of the object, the logic that governs the relation of subject and object, thinking and being, is no longer one of false opposition but of distinction in inseparable relation. This logic is sophisticated and formal, and handles the whole question of knowing more synoptically.

This transformation is the circle returning back into itself, which presupposes its beginning and reaches its beginning only at the end. (§802)

Sie ist der in sich zurückgehende Kreis, der seinen Anfang voraussetzt und ihn nur im Ende erreicht. (*PhG* 429)

This claim is pervasive in the Preface to the *Phenomenology* and relates to his approach to the absolute (as a noun) or to absolute knowing (as an adjective): absoluteness is a result, not a beginning. It may govern everything, from a certain philosophical perspective, but that perspective does not appear fully formed at the outset: it takes time to develop. And, as we saw in §801, once it has developed, it does away with time itself in a certain sense.

Insofar as spirit therefore is within itself necessarily this act of distinguishing, its intuited whole faces up against its simple self-consciousness, and since that whole is what is distinguished, it is thus distinguished into its intuited pure concept, into *time*, and into the content, that is, into the *in-itself*. Substance, as subject, has in it *the initial inward* necessity of exhibiting itself in itself as what it is *in itself*, *as spirit*. Only the consummated objective presentation is it at the same time the reflection of substance or the process in which substance becomes Self. (§802)³⁶

Insofern der Geist also notwendig dieses Unterscheiden in sich ist, tritt sein Ganzes angeschaut seinem einfachen Selbstbewußtsein gegenüber, und da also jenes das unterschiedene ist, so ist es unterschieden in seinen angeschauten reinen Begriff, in *die Zeit*, und in den Inhalt oder in das *An-sich*; die Substanz hat, als Subjekt, *die erst innere* Notwendigkeit an ihr, sich an ihr selbst als das darzustellen, was sie *an sich* ist, *als Geist*. Die vollendete gegenständliche Darstellung ist erst zugleich die Reflexion derselben oder das Werden derselben zum Selbst. (*PhG* 429)

³⁶ Translation amended at the end.

It is worth noting that in the first clause “within itself” is *in sich*, not *an sich*, which is presumably why Pinkard translates it as “within itself” rather than “in itself” – to avoid confusion over whether the technical logical meaning is in play. We can paraphrase this short section. When we talk of spirit we are talking of a form of action that makes distinctions; on the one hand it has a sense of the whole; on the other hand it now has self-consciousness; it starts to make distinctions within this whole and resolves it into two aspects: the theater in which things appear, namely time, and the content that appears in that theater, namely objects of consciousness. Substance (to take Spinoza’s primary agent) and subject (to take Kant’s) are two ways of thinking about one agency, which we call spirit; and spirit not only acts, as subject, but considers itself, as an object; but this process whereby spirit appears to itself, as an object, is more adequately described as substance *reflecting* itself, or we might say that it becomes a self.

Hegel is here thus tracing the genesis of the self in thinking, and is leaving to one side an alternative way of thinking about substance, where it is taken as nature. It begins with the subject taking itself as an object. And at this early stage, the logic which governs this is an opposition between subject and object. One can see why Hegel should spend time on this question. In a logic where subject and object are conceived as opposed to each other, and where the subject appears to itself, it appears to itself as an object. But what has happened to the subject *as subject*? To those familiar with later twentieth-century French philosophy, which takes up Hegel’s question, this is the vexed issue of whether the subject can be “present to itself.” For Hegel the question isn’t vexed at all. The question of whether the subject can or cannot be present to itself only arises if one’s thinking is governed by a logic where subject and object are opposed. If one’s thinking is governed by a different logic, where subject and object are conceived as distinct but in inseparable relation, then the question of self-presence will need to be parsed rather differently, and the French post-modern concerns do not arise at all (to the extent that they are governed by a logic of opposition). Hegel names the non-oppositional logic “the concept,” and he calls the form of thinking that deals in the concept “absolute knowing.”

It is also worth indicating a quite different approach to the relation of subject to itself that Hegel does not consider: this is Schelling’s account of subjectivity in which questions of the unconscious and particularly of artistic activity are to the fore. Where Hegel recasts the entire question of the subject’s self-presence by developing an alternative logic, Schelling recasts it by developing a richer ontology, in which artistic expression displays the subjectivity of the subject without rendering it as an object that can be grasped.

Hence, as long as spirit has not *in itself* brought itself to consummation as the world-spirit, it cannot attain its consummation as *self-conscious* spirit. For that reason, the content of religion expresses what *spirit is* earlier in time than science does, but it is science alone which is spirit's true knowledge of itself. (§802)

Eh daher der Geist nicht *an sich*, nicht als Weltgeist sich vollendet, kann er nicht als *selbstbewußter* Geist seine Vollendung erreichen. Der Inhalt der Religion spricht darum früher in der Zeit, als die Wissenschaft, es aus, was der *Geist ist*, aber diese ist allein sein wahres Wissen von ihm selbst. (PhG 429)

These two sentences contain suggestive language whose vagueness can invite a variety of interpretations; it is important to read them in the context of what precedes and follows them. The language of world spirit (*Weltgeist*) is highly evocative, and has led to Hegel's reputation (at least in the *Phenomenology*) for believing in a kind of embracing giant organism that gradually becomes aware of itself. This is nonsense. The "world spirit" hardly appears at all in the *Phenomenology*. There are perhaps half a dozen references to it, and they are all – like the one here – rather brief and not filled out. It is a mistake to think that the world spirit is a "thing" that Hegel is trying to describe. It is much more fruitful to inquire into the context where Hegel chooses to use language like this, and to discover the questions he is seeking to answer. In each case (in the Preface, in the discussions of "reason," of "religion," and here of "absolute knowing") the topic of discussion is the way that *individual* knowledge comes to be understood as in inseparable relation to social action. Language of world spirit does for the individual and society what language of the concept does for thinking and being: it refers to the overcoming of a false opposition. It is much more the liberation of the subject from the prison of the Cartesian individual *cogito* than it is a tentacled monster from a Lovecraft short story. This should be rather obvious, because the conception of a "great devouring maw" (to use Pippin's wonderful phrase) is evidently an object that appears in consciousness (in this case the consciousness of the reader), whereas the whole point of the *Phenomenology* is to gain a different account of subjectivity, through elaborating an alternative logic of distinctness in inseparable relation. As so often, if one tries to interpret Hegel's claims as solely ontological, rather than logical, problems emerge.

The second sentence is equally interesting: it suggests a relation between spirit, religion, and science. (Science here is Hegel's term narrowly conceived, meaning the kind of philosophical investigations exemplified by the *Phenomenology*.) The over-arching idea is that spirit develops: it comes to be what it is. In other words, spirit does not merely exist, in some fixed form,

and then philosophy uncovers more and more of it, like some metaphysical scratch-card. The philosophical inquiries mark real developments in the subject's sense of its actions, especially in the realm of self-consciousness, and these mean that spirit itself is subject to change. The main claim at the end of §802 is that content precedes form: what spirit is can be seen (in religious life) earlier than the forms of thinking that reflect on what spirit is (in philosophical inquiry). The meaning of "science alone . . . is spirit's true knowledge of itself" is this: only when we have philosophical accounts like the *Phenomenology* do we have an *account* of spirit, and not just an appearance of it.

§803 is a challenge for any reader of the *Phenomenology*, and is a test of one's grasp of the history of ideas. It is for this reason that Hyppolite places it at the head of his interpretation of the entire chapter on "absolute knowing" and, rather like a street performer inflating the difficulty of the feats to be performed, warns the reader:

Hegel, when he deals with absolute knowledge, that is, speculative philosophy, condensed the entire development of philosophy into a single page, beginning with the medieval church and ending with the philosophy of his time. . . . In one page Hegel summarizes the movement of philosophical thought from Descartes to Fichte, via Spinoza and Leibniz, but he doesn't name any philosophers.³⁷

We need not be quite so intimidated. Allegra de Laurentiis offers a rather less macho assessment: Hegel uses the chapter on "absolute knowing" to offer two recapitulations of the philosophical journey of the *Phenomenology*. The first runs from §788 to §802, and the second – much more compressed – recapitulation runs through §803. Whereas the first recapitulation rehearses the philosophical journey itself, ending at "the concept" and "spirit," the second recapitulation focuses on the way that spirit displays "two opposite and complementary developments."³⁸ In one direction, there is the phenomenon of "self-emptying" or "externalization" (*Entäußerung* – Hegel's term inspired by Philippians 2) of spirit. This is the story of spirit's outward experience, or what we might call its encounter with "the world out there." In the other direction, there is the phenomenon of interiority, or "going into itself" of spirit. This is the narrative of spirit's ever-deeper discovery (and finally articulation) of its own structure and its own agency. These two directional movements mirror the distinction between *an sich* and *für sich*.

We can begin to see why §803, which relates these two movements to each other, might want to rehearse some modern philosophy. It is important to notice where the emphasis lies. If Hegel had wanted to produce a sweeping

³⁷ Hyppolite, *Genesis and Structure*, p. 573.

³⁸ De Laurentiis, "Absolute Knowing," p. 258.

and impressive series of philosophical flourishes he would have done much better to start with Plato (or even the Pre-Socratics) and then placed his own philosophy at the pinnacle. Hegel is often said to be doing just that. But Hyppolite is right: Hegel starts with Descartes. Now Descartes might seem far distant to a twenty-first-century thinker as he peers back into the murky depths of the seventeenth century. But Hegel's *Phenomenology* is about a century and a half later than Descartes' major works: it is really quite recent from an early nineteenth-century perspective. So the decision to start with Descartes must have something to do with some particular problems that he bequeaths, rather than a concern to rehearse in a self-congratulatory way the history of philosophy. Once one treats the matter in this way it becomes quickly obvious what problems they are: Descartes offers a one-sided account of only the second of these movements: the *cogito* is the journey inwards, and it is not properly accompanied (as it should be) by an account of the journey outwards. Kant saw this very clearly in his critique of "transcendental realism" where, in Descartes, the conditions for knowledge are merely experience of one's ideas, with no meaningful way to talk about things in the world.

Hegel's framework, then, is a story of the journey outward (history) and a story of the journey inward (post-Cartesian philosophy), and his own contribution is to integrate these stories in a way that overcomes the false oppositions that they each display. If Hegel can do this adequately, then perhaps he deserves some kind of pinnacle.

I propose to take the paragraph in seven sections, and paraphrase each in turn with occasional pauses to note terms that have a technical use for Hegel.

<p>The movement of propelling forward the form of its self-knowledge is the work which spirit accomplishes as <i>actual history</i>. (§803)</p>	<p>Die Bewegung, die Form seines Wissens von sich hervorzutreiben, ist die Arbeit, die er als <i>wirkliche Geschichte</i> vollbringt. (<i>PhG</i> 430)</p>
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This sentence has a number of now-familiar terms in quick succession: movement, form, and work – together with the connection (new in this part of the chapter) between self-knowledge and work. It is thus compressed. Spirit performs *work* (or *labor* in translations that echo the older Marxist literary tradition) as it develops its self-knowledge. This self-knowledge takes a certain *form* and is not merely a particular content (and elsewhere in this chapter we know that this form is "the concept"). As it acquires this form,

an acquisition which is a historical event, we can discern the *motion* that characterizes spirit.

The religious community, insofar as it is initially the substance of absolute spirit, is the raw consciousness which has an existence which is all the more harsh and barbaric as its inner spirit is deeper, and whose dull and expressionless self has an even more difficult labor in dealing with its essence, that is, with the alien content of its consciousness. Not until it has abandoned the hope of sublating that way of being alien in an external, i.e., alien, manner, and because the sublated alien manner is itself the return into self-consciousness, does that consciousness in itself turn to itself, turn to its own world and present time, and discover that world to be its own possession. When it has done this, it will have taken the first step to descend from the *intellectual world*, or rather to spiritualize the abstract element of the intellectual world with the actual self. (§803)³⁹

Die religiöse Gemeinde, insofern sie zuerst die Substanz des absoluten Geistes ist, ist das rohe Bewußtsein, das ein um so barbarischeres und härteres Dasein hat, je tiefer sein innerer Geist ist, und sein dumpfes Selbst eine um so härtere Arbeit mit seinem Wesen, dem ihm fremden Inhalte seines Bewußtseins. Erst nachdem es die Hoffnung aufgegeben, auf eine äußerliche, d.h. fremde Weise das Fremdsein aufzuheben, wendet es sich, weil die aufgehobne fremde Weise die Rückkehr ins Selbstbewußtsein ist, an sich selbst, an seine eigne Welt und Gegenwart, entdeckt sie als sein Eigentum und hat somit den ersten Schritt getan, aus der *Intellektualwelt* herabzusteigen, oder vielmehr deren abstraktes Element mit dem wirklichen Selbst zu begeisten. (*PhG* 430)

The content of spirit precedes the form it comes to take, however. We can return to the previous chapter, on religion, to see this content. Religious thinking is governed by an opposition between self and other. [This is not so much the human self and the divine other, although that too is governed by opposition, as the human subject and the world of objects.] There is a similar opposition between being and thinking, especially the “essence” (*Wesen*) that appears in “consciousness” (*Bewußtsein*). It has a barbaric outer “existence” (*Dasein*) that contrasts with its deep “inner” spirit. These strong contrasts make its work tough, because the object appears alien to it. The work it has to undertake is to “sublate” that alienness, that is, to find

³⁹ Translation amended by Nicholas Walker.

a way of engaging objects without treating them as alien. Once religious thinking stops treating objects as “out there” (which after all means they remain “alien”) and discovers that objects appear in consciousness, it can understand its consciousness of objects as a form of self-consciousness. What begins as a concern with externality becomes a concern with inner life: it discovers that rather than there just being a world, it – the subject – “has” a world. And this world is not just an “intellectual world” in the mind [which might also be considered “alien” to the subject – if thoughts just “happen to it”]; it comes to see that certain operations it performs vis-à-vis the intellectual world are evidence of the action of a self – an actual self [and not just a potential one]. [This sounds like Descartes.]

On the one hand, through observation, it finds existence as thought, and it conceptually comprehends existence, and, conversely, it finds existence within its thought. When it has itself initially and abstractly expressed the immediate *unity of thought and being*, of abstract essence and the self, and when it has expressed the luminous essence more *purely*, namely, as the unity of extension and being – since extension is a simplicity more selfsame to pure thought than light is – and thereby has once again revived in thought the *substance* of the easterly dawn, then, at the same time, spirit recoils from this abstract unity, from this *self-less* substantiality, and affirms individuality against it. (§803)

Durch die Beobachtung einerseits findet es das Dasein als Gedanken und begreift dasselbe, und umgekehrt in seinem Denken das Dasein. Indem es so zunächst die unmittelbare *Einheit des Denkens und Seins*, des abstrakten Wesens und des Selbsts, selbst abstrakt ausgesprochen und das erste Lichtwesen *reiner*, nämlich als Einheit der Ausdehnung und des Seins – denn Ausdehnung ist die dem reinen Denken gleichere Einfachheit, denn das Licht ist – und hiemit im Gedanken die *Substanz* des Aufgangs wieder erweckt hat, schaudert der Geist zugleich von dieser abstrakten Einheit, von dieser *selbstlosen* Substantialität zurück, und behauptet die Individualität gegen sie. (*PhG* 430)

This has two aspects. The subject can observe its own thinking, and where it sees “existence” (*Dasein*) it sees thoughts; and from the other way around, where it inspects its thoughts, it sees existence. Where thinking and being were previously governed by opposition, they are now governed by identity: thinking and being, *Selbst* and *Wesen*, are united. [The turn to self-consciousness has eliminated the “world out there” entirely.] A notion of the one “substance” emerges in which thought and extension are not opposed to each other, but are part of a simple unity. [This sounds like Spinoza.] But

this substance seems unconnected with the self – it is an “abstract unity” – and the individuality of the self is affirmed against it.

However, only after spirit in its cultural development has emptied itself of this self-less substantiality and as a result has made it into existence and infused all existence with it – and after it has arrived at the thought of utility, and in absolute freedom, has it grasped existence as its will. At that point spirit thereby puts on view the thought which lies in its innermost depths and expresses the essence as the “I = I.” (§803)

Erst aber nachdem er diese in der Bildung entäußert, dadurch sie zum Dasein gemacht und in allem Dasein sie durchgesetzt, – zum Gedanken der Nützlichkeit gekommen, und in der absoluten Freiheit das Dasein als seinen Willen erfaßt, kehrt er somit den Gedanken seiner innersten Tiefe heraus, und spricht das Wesen als Ich = Ich aus. (*PhG* 430)

At this stage of its development, spirit deals in new categories that were strikingly absent from the pure substance: utility and freedom, to begin with, both of which are summed up in “the will.” [This sounds like Kant.] An insight that lies at the base of this way of thinking is then made explicit: the I is the I, that is, the I that is the subject is identical to the I that is the object. [This sounds like Fichte.]

However, this “I = I” is the self-reflecting movement, for since this selfsameness as absolute negativity is the absolute distinction, the selfsameness of the I confronts this pure distinction. This pure distinction, which exists at the same time as something objective to the self knowing itself, is to be expressed as *time*, so that just as the essence used to be expressed as the unity of thought and extension, it could here be interpreted as the unity of thought and time; (§803)

Dies Ich = Ich ist aber die sich in sich selbst reflektierende Bewegung; denn indem diese Gleichheit als absolute Negativität der absolute Unterschied ist, so steht die Sichselbstgleichheit des Ich diesem reinen Unterschiede gegenüber, der als der reine und zugleich dem sich wissenden Selbst gegenständliche, als die *Zeit* auszusprechen ist, so daß wie vorhin das Wesen als Einheit des Denkens und der Ausdehnung ausgesprochen wurde, es als Einheit des Denkens und der Zeit zu fassen wäre; (*PhG* 430)

For the formula “I = I” is reflexive. The distinction between subject and object is identical to the sameness of the I. In the idea of the one substance,

thought and extension were taken to be identical; in this reflexive turn the identity is between thought and time. This is because the distinctions within the I are not spatial but temporal: I think one thing and then another.

However, the distinction left to itself, namely, time that is unresting and unhalting, even more so collapses into itself; it is *extension* objectively at rest, but this extension is pure selfsameness with itself, is the I. – Or, the I is not merely the self, it is also the *selfsameness of the self with itself*. However, this selfsameness is the complete and immediate unity with itself, that is, this *subject* is just as much *substance*. (§803)⁴⁰

aber der sich selbst überlaßne Unterschied, die ruhe- und haltlose Zeit fällt vielmehr in sich selbst zusammen; sie ist die gegenständliche Ruhe der *Ausdehnung*, diese aber ist die reine Gleichheit mit sich selbst, das Ich. – Oder Ich ist nicht nur das Selbst, sondern es ist die *Gleichheit des Selbsts mit sich*; diese Gleichheit aber ist die vollkommene und unmittelbare Einheit mit sich selbst, oder *dies Subjekt* ist ebensosehr die *Substanz*. (PhG 430–431)

A series of oppositions can be seen to dissolve into unity: thought and time coalesce; thought and extension coalesce; the I as subject and the I as object coalesce. The one subject can no longer be distinguished from the one substance. They are identical.

Substance solely on its own would be intuition devoid of content, that is, the intuition of a content which, as determinate, would merely be accidental, that is, devoid of any necessity. The substance would merely count as the absolute insofar as the substance was to be thought of, or intuited as, *absolute unity*, and all content would in terms of its diversity have to fall outside of substance; it would fall into reflection, which would not belong to substance because substance would then not be subject, would not be itself what is taking a

Die Substanz für sich allein wäre das inhaltsleere Anschauen oder das Anschauen eines Inhalts, der als bestimmter nur Akzidentalität hätte, und ohne Notwendigkeit wäre; die Substanz gälte nur insofern als das absolute, als sie als die *absolute Einheit* gedacht oder angeschaut wäre, und aller Inhalt müßte nach seiner Verschiedenheit außer ihr in die Reflexion fallen, die ihr nicht angehört, weil sie nicht Subjekt, nicht das über sich und sich in sich Reflektierende oder nicht als Geist begriffen wäre. Wenn doch von einem Inhalte gesprochen werden

⁴⁰ Translation amended by Nicholas Walker.

would then not be subject, would not be itself what is taking a reflective turn into itself and reflecting about itself, that is, would not be conceived as spirit. However much one were nonetheless to speak of a content, such content would still be, on the one hand, spoken of merely in order to cast it into the empty abyss of the absolute content, while on the other hand, it would be externally gathered up from out of sensuous perception. Knowledge would seem to have arrived at things, at what is distinct from knowledge itself, and at the distinctions among multiple things without conceptually grasping how it got there or from where it came. (§803)

begriffen wäre. Wenn doch von einem Inhalte gesprochen werden sollte, so wäre es teils nur, um ihn in den leeren Abgrund des absoluten zu werfen, teils aber wäre er äußerlich aus der sinnlichen Wahrnehmung aufgerafft; das Wissen schiene zu Dingen, dem Unterschiede von ihm selbst, und dem Unterschiede mannigfaltiger Dinge gekommen zu sein, ohne daß man begriffe, wie und woher. (*PhG* 431)

Substance by itself can be thought of as “the absolute.” [This sounds like Schelling.] It is an absolute unity without differentiation. Any determinate “content” would have to be something other than substance. But then any reflection by a subject would be an act by something other than substance. And it is now entirely mysterious how this comes about. Content seems to disappear into an abyss, because the absolute has no content, no differentiation. But content equally seems to come from outside, from the senses. Philosophy’s account of knowledge seems tied to the absolute, which has no content. And content seems tied to sense perception, which is utterly other than the absolute, and so has no connection to knowledge. This whole approach displays radically contrary tendencies which cannot be reconciled.

This last critique (presumably of Schelling) ends what de Laurentiis refers to as the “second recapitulation” and it takes us up to Hegel’s own repair of the modern philosophical tradition. It is worth pausing to say that Hegel’s account of Descartes, Spinoza, Kant, Fichte, and Schelling need not be uncritically accepted. Any one of these thinkers can be shown to have a sense of the challenges posed by their own work that is richer and more sophisticated than Hegel suggests here. Schelling, for example, will offer an account of the primacy of being that calls into question the kind of “knowledge” that Hegel takes for granted. Indeed, it is because Hegel has the view of knowledge that he has that Schelling’s philosophy looks so hopelessly confused

to him. Once one starts to query the scope of knowledge itself, as Schelling rather brilliantly does, a range of other questions comes swiftly into view.⁴¹

§804 begins the chapter's principal statements of the main themes. It clarifies Hegel's logical revisions in a way that explicitly answers the problems and questions bequeathed by prior philosophers.

However, spirit has shown itself to us to be neither the mere withdrawal of self-consciousness into its pure inwardness, nor the mere absorption of self-consciousness into substance and the non-being of its distinction. Rather, it has shown itself to be *this movement* of the self which empties itself of itself and immerses itself in its substance, and which likewise, as subject, has both taken the inward turn into itself from out of that substance and has made its substance into an object and a content, just as it has sublated this distinction between objectivity and content. (§804)

Der Geist aber hat sich uns gezeigt, weder nur das Zurückziehen des Selbstbewußtseins in seine reine Innerlichkeit zu sein, noch die bloße Versenkung desselben in die Substanz und das Nichtsein seines Unterschiedes, sondern *diese Bewegung* des Selbsts, das sich seiner selbst entäußert und sich in seine Substanz versenkt, und ebenso als Subjekt aus ihr in sich gegangen ist, und sie zum Gegenstande und Inhalte macht, als es diesen Unterschied der Gegenständlichkeit und des Inhalts aufhebt. (*PhG* 431)

Hegel's task is to overcome false oppositions, and to produce a logic where terms retain their distinctness, but are inseparably related to each other. This is the *leitmotiv* of my interpretation of this chapter. In this section we see how Hegel gets there. The key term is "motion" or "movement" (*Bewegung*). From the perspective of the reader of the *Phenomenology*, spirit is seen to be neither a withdrawal into interiority (Descartes) nor an absorption into substance (Spinoza). Drawing on the language of Philippians 2, the self "empties itself of itself" (*entäußert sich seiner selbst*) and "immerses itself in its substance" (*versenkt sich in seine Substanz*). This kind of claim can lead Hegel's readers to stare at the page, waiting for some meaning to give itself up. But actually these claims are in a certain sense quite properly empty. They do not contain a meaning that needs to be drawn out of them. Their sense lies in the job they perform. There are two terms in play here: "self" and "substance." It would have been neater, perhaps, if they were "subject"

⁴¹ The most lucid and persuasive account of this can be found in the chapter "Schelling or Hegel?" in Andrew Bowie, *Schelling and Modern European Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 1993), pp. 127–177.

and “substance,” as that is what Hegel means. They can certainly just as much be “thinking” and “being.” The “self-emptying” of the self is not a loss of self, but a “going out” or “objectification” into the world. And the “self-immersion” in substance is not an absorption into an abyss but a participation in that which transcends it. (It is important to note that Hegel does not use the language of participation, nor that of transcendence – a fact that provokes strong criticism from theologically minded readers like William Desmond. But the logic Hegel elaborates seems to me manifestly a logic of participation, and this commentary on “absolute knowing” is my argument to support this claim.) To treat subject and substance as distinct but in relation, and to do the same for thinking and being; that is Hegel’s goal here. But he does not merely assert it. He tries to show that spirit exhibits *motion*: we (the readers of the *Phenomenology*) have seen it. We have witnessed the self-emptying and the self-immersion in the narrative that Hegel has laid out in the book. We have seen them sequentially, in time, in history. And we have witnessed Hegel as he “gathers” these “moments” together and takes them out of time, into the de-tensed “concept.” It is in the service of this account that Hegel insists, in §804, on the benefits that are to be had from self-emptying, and the need for subjectivity not to fear that something is being lost.

§805 has a somewhat triumphant tone, as it summarizes where we have arrived:

Therefore, in this knowing, spirit has brought to a close the movement of giving shape to itself insofar as that movement is burdened with the insurmountable distinctions of consciousness. Spirit has won the pure element of its existence, the concept. (§805)

In dem Wissen hat also der Geist die Bewegung seines Gestaltens beschlossen, insofern dasselbe mit dem unüberwundenen Unterschiede des Bewußtseins behaftet ist. Er hat das reine Element seines Daseins, den Begriff, gewonnen.
(*PhG* 431–432)

“This knowing” is “absolute knowing.” The motion or movement of spirit is arrested, closed. Rather strikingly, Hegel affirms that consciousness’ distinctions have utter integrity: they cannot be conjured away. Spirit wins, in the midst of such consciousness, a purity to its being (or “existence,” *Dasein*) which Hegel calls “the concept.” It is quite clear here that thinking (consciousness) and being (existence) are being placed in a relation of distinctness (neither absorbs the other) and harmonious relation (neither wins out over the other). The distinctions of consciousness (or just “difference” for those who prefer a French idiom) are (or is) utterly at the heart of “the concept.” Here one can see how profoundly Hegel is influenced by the doctrine of the Trinity, where unity and difference are preserved, in relation to

each other. This is something he spells out in his *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, as we will see in two chapters' time. For the moment we can here simply note the gracefulness with which Hegel reconciles unity and difference while preserving their distinction from each other. The rest of this paragraph spells this out.

In terms of the *freedom* of its *being*, the content is the self emptying itself of itself, that is, it is the immediate unity of self-knowledge. Considered with regard to the content, the pure movement of this self-emptying constitutes the *necessity* of this content. The diversity of content exists as *determinate content* in sets of relations, not in itself, and its restlessness consists in its sublating itself, that is, it consists in *negativity*. Thus, necessity, or diversity, just like free-standing being, is equally the self, and in this self-like *form* within which existence is immediately thought, the content is the *concept*. (§805)

Der Inhalt ist nach der *Freiheit* seines *Seins* das sich entäußernde Selbst, oder die *unmittelbare* Einheit des Sich-selbst-wissens. Die reine Bewegung dieser Entäußerung macht, sie am Inhalte betrachtet, die *Notwendigkeit* desselben aus. Der verschiedene Inhalt ist als *bestimmter* im Verhältnisse, nicht an sich, und seine Unruhe, sich selbst aufzuheben, oder die *Negativität*; also ist die Notwendigkeit oder Verschiedenheit, wie das freie Sein, ebenso das Selbst, und in dieser selbstischen *Form*, worin das Dasein unmittelbar Gedanke ist, ist der Inhalt *Begriff*. (PhG 432)

The theme of freedom is central to Hegel's account of absolute knowing, even though it is not as often at the forefront of discussion as the concept. Freedom is not a logical term, in the way "the concept" is, and this is perhaps why it is not as frequently discussed. The issue of freedom does not bear on the question of false oppositions or their reconciliation in a logic of participation. Indeed freedom is a term that can itself be falsely opposed to receptivity. But it is vital for Hegel. Knowing is a matter of free producing as much as it is a matter of determined receptivity, and in various ways Hegel attempts to describe how this can be. In this paragraph Hegel suggests that "the content" (i.e. *what* I think) is "the self emptying self" (*das sich entäußernde Selbst*). In rather less compressed language, the free action of the subject consists of "emptying" (or perhaps "externalizing") itself, and this "is" (or perhaps "produces") the content of its consciousness. This might look alarmingly similar to Fichte's claims about the I, but we know by this stage that spirit is a way of talking about the distinctness-in-relation of "I" and "We," and we have also begun to grasp the significance of the difference between "positing" (*setzen*, Fichte's term) and "emptying"

(*entäußern*, Hegel's). It is thus not enough merely to note that, for Hegel, the subject freely produces its knowledge, although this is certainly an important reminder for readers whose default position is common-sense empiricism. It is also vital to say that the self knows, in part, through giving itself away; we could even translate the *versenken* of §804 in an extreme way and say that the subject "buries itself" or even – to echo John's Gospel – loses its self in order to gain its self. There is a certain generosity, and not just generativity, in Hegel's conception of the self. Freedom is central; but it is qualified in ways that seem deeply influenced by certain dimensions of Christian spirituality.

In this passage, freedom and necessity are both considered in relation to "content," that is, to the kinds of object that the subject contemplates. Freedom is associated with the self-emptying self; necessity is associated with the "motion" or "movement" of this self-emptying. As for Spinoza, determination is associated with negation. To differentiate this from that is to say what it is not: blue is not red; a toad is not a bird. And where the discussion moves from "content" to "form," we arrive again at the concept.

There is an important dimension to this discussion that can get overlooked if one is trying only to make sense of individual words like "determination" or "sublation": this is the relation that the terms have to one another, and the implicit logic that governs such relations. It is striking that "freedom" and "necessity," as well as "form" and "content," are not opposed to one another, as one might expect. They remain distinct, but Hegel consistently handles them as in inseparable relation to one another. As I have said before, if Hegel's reader is guided by a logic of opposition, Hegel's claims look like Fichte, at best, and as ambitious nonsense, at worst. But it is all well and good to say that the reader must be guided by the same logic that "the concept" eventually displays, and that "absolute knowing" itself arrives at; the problem is that most readers do not consider that they are guided by "a" logic at all. The normal contrast is "logical" or "not logical," rather than "guided by this logic" or "guided by that logic." Part of the education one receives reading Hegel is to become much more aware of which logics guide which kinds of approach, and not just which ontologies inform which kinds of description.

Since therefore spirit has attained the concept, it unfolds existence and movement within this ether of its life, and it is *science*. The moments of its movement no longer exhibit themselves within that movement as determinate *shapes* of *consciousness*; rather, since the distinction within consciousness has returned into the

Indem also der Geist den Begriff gewonnen, entfaltet er das Dasein und Bewegung in diesem Äther seines Lebens, und ist *Wissenschaft*. Die Momente seiner Bewegung stellen sich in ihr nicht mehr als bestimmte *Gestalten* des *Bewußtseins* dar, sondern indem der Unterschied desselben in das Selbst

self, the moments exhibit themselves as *determinate concepts* and as the organic self-grounded movement of these concepts. However much in the phenomenology of spirit, each moment is both the distinction between knowing and truth and the movement in which that distinction sublates itself, nonetheless science does not, in contrast, contain this distinction and its sublation. Rather, since the moment has the form of the concept, it unites the objective form of truth and that of the knowing self into an immediate unity. (§805)

zurückgegangen, als *bestimmte Begriffe*, und als die organische in sich selbst gegründete Bewegung derselben. Wenn in der Phänomenologie des Geistes jedes Moment der Unterschied des Wissens und der Wahrheit und die Bewegung ist, in welcher er sich aufhebt, so enthält dagegen die Wissenschaft diesen Unterschied und dessen Aufheben nicht, sondern indem das Moment die Form des Begriffs hat, vereinigt es die gegenständliche Form der Wahrheit und des wissenden Selbst in unmittelbarer Einheit. (*PhG* 432)

When spirit reaches the stage where it is “concept,” i.e. when its form (its explicit way of thinking) matches its content (the right relation between subject and object), its account of itself is (philosophical) “science.” Instead of the successive “shapes” of consciousness, which have been tracked throughout the *Phenomenology*, the different particular features displayed by different kinds of orientation towards objects are displayed as “concepts,” which are synoptic rather than successive. There is nevertheless “motion” or “movement” in concepts, but this is “self-grounded.” This is a somewhat obscure formulation, but it clearly identifies the difference between a concern with “shapes,” which has been the concern of most of the book up until this final chapter, and a concern with logic or “science.” The question is what different kinds of motion Hegel might have in mind. In the case of “shapes of consciousness” this is history, or events in the world, as was clearly stated at the head of §803. I have been suggesting from time to time that the distinguishing mark of “the concept” is that its form of thinking is “de-tensed” or “synoptic.” Why would Hegel want to invoke “movement” when *this* form of thinking is in the frame? The answer is that Hegel’s account even of the most “de-tensed” forms of thinking remains utterly *dynamic*. This is not a temporal dynamism but a logical one: the different terms are inescapably related to each other, and so the thought of one “passes over” to the thought of the other one might say (and Hegel does say early on in the *Science of Logic*). The temporal or narrative dynamism of “shapes” is mirrored by the logical or relational dynamism of “the concept.” The final clauses mirror the discussion in §798 about the relationship of certainty and truth, although here it is a more formal relationship between *knowing* and truth. This distinction seems to bear on the relationship between thinking

and being. Knowing is a “thinking”-type subjective action, whereas “truth” is a “being”-type objective state of affairs. Hegel’s point is that these are distinct but in relation. When Hegel refers to the “phenomenology of spirit” he is not referring primarily to the book he is writing, but to the kind of enterprise that has gone on in the preceding chapters: a narrative of the shapes of consciousness. In such a narrative, in a “phenomenology,” the distinction between knowing and truth is from time to time “sublated.” In other words, thinking arrives more nearly at truth at certain points – especially points where thinking discovers its own inadequacies – and there is a dynamism, a “movement” to be discerned in such events. “Science,” which is different from a phenomenology, is concerned with a philosophical account of “the concept” rather than with narratively described “shapes.” The historical dynamism which characterizes the relation between knowing and truth in phenomenology is mirrored by a logical dynamism in this relation in science. This logical dynamism involves uniting (*vereinigen*) and unity (*Einheit*) with respect to the “objective forms” of truth and the knowing subject. Hegel emphasizes through repetition the fact that this is not a temporal relation, where the object passes from consciousness to self-consciousness. Rather it is what he calls a “pure shape,” which is “liberated from its appearance in consciousness,” or the “pure concept”; this is dependent on “pure determinateness.” The repeated word here is “pure.” It is undoubtedly confusing that Hegel should use the word “shape” (even if it is “pure shape”) to describe this logical matter. It would perhaps be much clearer if Hegel stuck to “shapes” for phenomenology and “the concept” for logic. Here Hegel makes the word “pure” do all the important work, and he permits it to qualify shape, concept, and determinateness. It is also confusing that Hegel should qualify “concept” with “pure.” If purity characterizes logic (to distinguish it from phenomenology, which is characterized by “consciousness”), then the concept is already pure, for Hegel, and does not need to be further qualified. (To make matters worse, Kant does distinguish between pure and empirical concepts in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, and it is not at all helpful that Hegel’s choice of words is reminiscent of that discussion, which has little to do with what is going on here. For Kant “pure” means “independent of experience”: Hegel means more than that.)

Conversely, to every abstract moment of science, there corresponds a shape of appearing spirit per se. Just as existing spirit is not richer than science, so too spirit in its content is no poorer. To take cognizance of the pure concepts of

Umgekehrt entspricht jedem abstrakten Momente der Wissenschaft eine Gestalt des erscheinenden Geistes überhaupt. Wie der daseiende Geist nicht reicher ist als sie, so ist er in seinem Inhalte auch nicht ärmer. Die reinen

science in this form, namely, in which they are shapes of consciousness, is what constitutes the aspect of their reality. In terms of that reality, their essence, the concept, which is posited in that reality in its *simple* mediation as *thought*, breaks up and separates the moments of this mediation and exhibits itself in terms of their inner opposition. (§805)

Begriffe der Wissenschaft in dieser Form von Gestalten des Bewußtseins zu erkennen, macht die Seite ihrer Realität aus, nach welcher ihr Wesen, der Begriff, der in ihr in seiner *einfachen* Vermittlung als *Denken* gesetzt ist, die Momente dieser Vermittlung auseinanderschlägt und nach dem innern Gegensatz sich darstellt. (*PhG* 432)

What science displays as “abstract moments,” phenomenology takes as “shapes of appearing spirit.” The narrative of phenomenology “corresponds” to the abstraction of (philosophical) science. This can be taken as a bold claim about the relation of two different forms of inquiry, which we now know as the *Phenomenology of Spirit* and the *Science of Logic*. Hyppolite and others take this view when they see the final chapter of this book as a bridge to the next one. But it can also be taken as a more modest claim about what “philosophy” does: it makes explicit what in the historical narrative remains implicit. Absolute knowing is not just a different way of thinking about the relation of thinking and being; it is also itself in “narrative” continuity with the forms of thinking out of which it arises. One might even say that *of course* there is the correspondence Hegel insists on: what else could science be other than a different way of talking and thinking about forms of thinking that are inescapably historical intellectual settlements? Abstract thought *always* bears a relation to historically particular human action: it is its product. It can furthermore be taken simply as a preamble to the final point, if the latter is taken to be the most important part: that abstract thinking “breaks up” and “separates” (we might say “analyzes”) the successive narrative mediations of “reality” in thinking, and reconfigures them non-narratively in a way that draws attention to, and formalizes, their logical dynamism, their “inner opposition.” “Opposition” here refers to a kind of generative mutual implication, as readers of the *Science of Logic* soon discover, rather than to what I have been calling “false oppositions.”

§806 contains one of Hegel’s most profound philosophical insights, and one that many philosophers in the analytical tradition struggled to grasp until relatively recently. The *abstract* business of philosophy is not just parasitic on the *narrative* business of history; it also has a “necessity” to empty itself (*entäußern* again) into consciousness: the abstract must be able to be rendered narratively. *It is not a substitute for it*. Hegel adds a virtuoso flourish as a coda, however, and suggests that once one attains “the concept”

one can return all the way back to the beginning of the phenomenological narrative, to a kind of “sense certainty.” De Laurentiis interprets this as a claim that even “sense certainty” contains a germ of what will eventually be absolute knowing.⁴² There can be little doubt that Hegel does think this, but I am not sure that this paragraph is making that claim:

For self-knowing spirit, precisely because it grasps its own concept, is an immediate self-sameness with itself, which within its distinction is the *certainty of the immediate*, that is, is *sensuous consciousness* – the beginning from which we started; (§806)

Denn der sich selbst wissende Geist, eben darum, daß er seinen Begriff erfaßt, ist er die unmittelbare Gleichheit mit sich selbst, welche in ihrem Unterschiede die *Gewißheit vom Unmittelbaren* ist, oder das *sinnliche Bewußtsein*, – der Anfang, von dem wir ausgegangen; (*PhG* 432)

The plain sense of this sentence is that even absolute knowing has something of “immediacy,” of “certainty” about it, if one inspects its orientation to its self. One might say that the reflexivity of absolute knowing displays the same kind of structure as sense certainty displays towards matter in the world. De Laurentiis’ interpretation has the undoubted merit of making Hegel’s claim seem reasonable. It is a charitable reading. I am less charitable and suspect that Hegel is making unnecessary problems for himself here: one of the profoundest lessons of the *Phenomenology* is the insistence on mediation. Being is always mediated in thinking, and thinking is always mediated via being. Suddenly – at the end – to celebrate the *immediacy* of “self-knowing spirit” seems capricious. Hegel does not explain himself, and his remarks are very brief. His interpreter is not in a happy situation in this paragraph. My own charitable interpretation, consistent with (but going beyond) the text, is that Hegel is suggesting that mediation is not experienced as mediation: even the most highly mediated forms of knowing are experienced as something immediate. If Hegel means something like this, then we might say that for the subject, all experience *feels* immediate; the task is to discern the mediation that is operative; and even at the highest point of sophistication, absolute knowing, the subject’s action has a certain immediate character.

§807 sees Hegel deepen his difficulties, I think. He suggests that the self-emptying of the previous paragraph (the transition of the concept back to consciousness) lacks something. It “has not yet attained its consummate freedom.” There appears to be something about the relation of sense-certainty

⁴² De Laurentiis, “Absolute Knowing,” p. 261.

to the object which fails to achieve proper freedom. The suggestion may be that there is a one-sided emphasis on receptivity, to the detriment of a proper account of productivity or generativity.

Hegel goes on to make some strange-sounding claims, that bear little relation to what has come before. The first is that “Knowing is acquainted not merely with itself, but also with the negative of itself, that is, its limit.” De Laurentiis has a superb explanation of this distinctly odd claim: Hegel is anticipating the concerns of the philosophy of nature, and the philosophy of logic, as well as looking back over the concerns of the philosophy of spirit which the *Phenomenology* lays out. Talk about limits is clarified not in the *Phenomenology* but in the *Encyclopaedia*.⁴³ At the same time, it remains problematic (even though the claims are filled out later) that Hegel claims that knowledge is acquainted with its limit. There seems no basis for such a claim. Certainly, in any act of thinking the subject may grasp that it is limited, but it is quite another thing to claim that those limits can be thought. The second claim can be taken more fully:

[Spirit] intuit[s] outside of itself its pure *self* as *time* and likewise intuit[s] its *being* as space. This latter coming-to-be, *nature*, is its living, immediate coming-to-be. Nature, that is, spirit emptied of itself, is in its existence nothing but this eternal self-emptying of its *durable existence* and the movement which produces the *subject*. (§807)

[Der Geist stellt] sein reines *Selbst*, als *die Zeit* außer ihm, und ebenso sein Sein als Raum anschauend [dar]. Dieses sein letzteres Werden, *die Natur*, ist sein lebendiges unmittelbares Werden; sie, der entäußerte Geist, ist in ihrem Dasein nichts als diese ewige Entäußerung ihres *Bestehens* und die Bewegung, die das *Subjekt* herstellt. (*PhG* 433)

This does indeed appear to be highly abbreviated, and somewhat mysterious, unless taken as an advertisement for philosophical work yet to be published, which will form the second part of the *Encyclopaedia*, the philosophy of nature. The main claim appears to be that time and space can be considered as part of a philosophy of logic, as they are here in this final chapter, or in the terms of a philosophy of nature, and that this will match up with the idea of spirit emptying itself (presumably “into consciousness,” as in the previous paragraph); this inquiry into “nature” will correspond in some way to the notion of the “subject” developed in the *Phenomenology*. It is difficult to say more than this without starting to exegete other texts, but one thing stands out: just as the self’s action is a kind of self-emptying as

⁴³ Ibid., pp. 260–261; de Laurentiis provides all the relevant references.

it engages cognitively with the world, so nature is always emptying itself, or objectifying itself: its forms give themselves up to create new, different forms. There is thus a strong analogy, for Hegel, between the adventures of the subject and the adventures of nature itself.

§808 is the final section of the chapter, and of the *Phenomenology*. Hegel returns to his favorite philosophical category: *history*. This paragraph is partly an evocation and celebration of what has already been achieved in the *Phenomenology*; but it is also partly an advertisement for the planned next part of *System of Science* of which the *Phenomenology* is the first part. It is well known that Hegel's publication plans changed radically after this, owing to circumstances (and different teaching duties) surrounding his move to Nuremberg, and instead of continuing with a second volume his next work would be his (sometimes mentioned but often unread) masterpiece, *Wissenschaft der Logik*. This paragraph is thus something of a mixture of review and prospect.

However, the other aspect of spirit's coming-to-be, *history*, is that *mindful self-mediating* coming-to-be— the spirit emptied into time. However, this emptying is likewise the self-emptying of itself; the negative is the negative of itself. This coming-to-be exhibits a languid movement and succession of spirits, a gallery of pictures, of which each, endowed with the entire wealth of spirit, moves itself so slowly because the self has to take hold of and assimilate the whole of this wealth of its substance. (§808)

Die andere Seite aber seines Werdens, die *Geschichte*, ist das *wissende sich vermittelnde* Werden – der an die Zeit entäußerte Geist; aber diese Entäußerung ist ebenso die Entäußerung ihrer selbst; das Negative ist das Negative seiner selbst. Dies Werden stellt eine träge Bewegung und Aufeinanderfolge von Geistern dar, eine Galerie von Bildern, deren jedes, mit dem vollständigen Reichtume des Geistes ausgestattet, eben darum sich so träge bewegt, weil das Selbst diesen ganzen Reichtum seiner Substanz zu durchdringen und zu verdauen hat. (*PhG* 433)

We have everything all at once at the start: history, knowing, mediation, time, spirit. This characterizes what Hegel calls the “other aspect” which complements the previous discussion of nature. We thus have two aspects – nature and history – which together form a significant part of Hegel's elaboration of his systematic intentions. There will be a third aspect alongside the philosophy of nature and the philosophy of history which does not in this paragraph have a name, although its outlines are described. Hegel will later call this simply *logic*.

History here refers to three aspects of spirit's action which are in view. The first is that it is *wissend*. This is a difficult word to translate (Pinkard renders it "mindful" above) because present participles have a narrower use as adjectives in English. We do not say "the walking dog" or "the knowing child"; we say "the dog that's walking" or "the child who knows." So *das wissende Werden* cannot elegantly be rendered "knowing becoming," although that is what Hegel means. The second is that it is "self-mediating." This has two aspects of its own – the fact that it is mediated, and the fact that apparently it is not mediated by something else, but itself does the mediating. This is an odd claim. The whole point about mediation is that something other than the object is involved in the signification of an object. Self-mediation appears to be something of a contradiction. It is better considered a contraction of a whole chain of argument with which we are already familiar. The terms "self" and "other" are distinct but in relation, in Hegel's Chalcedonian logic. That means that even something as other-involving as mediation is inseparably bound up with its relation to the self. This is the reason for my saying that *apparently* it is not by something else, but does its own mediating. This way of putting things places the self and other in opposition; Hegel places them in distinction-in-relation. "Self" is a self-type word (obviously) and "mediation" is an other-type word. To say "self-mediating," as Hegel does here, is to show what he would call their logical "unity." The third is "becoming." This is one of Hegel's most important words, imported from the Greek tradition. As we have seen from time to time, Hegel is interested in the relations of *dunamis*, *energeia*, and *entelecheia*, which he re-authors and reimagines as "in itself," "for itself," and "in and for itself." Spirit is not a timeless soul, for Hegel. It is utterly temporal; it develops; it unfolds; it changes; it learns. Forms of thinking do not just live and develop, for Hegel. They also die. "Becoming" is not just a description of more and more; it can also embrace less and less. For Hegel, becoming more and becoming less are also intimately related, as we can see in such unusual philosophical terms as "self-emptying" (*Entäußerung*) in which spirit's loss of self, through its focus on the other, is at the same time spirit's gaining of a certain externalization in the world. The only way for spirit to be in the world (as opposed to remaining imprisoned in interiority, as for Descartes) is for it to empty itself, for Hegel. To ask a question guided by a logic of opposition, "is this loss or gain?", is to invite an answer guided by a logic of distinction-in-inseparable-relation, "it is a unity of loss and gain." It is as I suggested earlier thus somewhat like marriage, which is perhaps the most intense unity of loss and gain that a person can undergo. The gain does not in any simple way cancel or compensate the loss – something is genuinely lost – but transforms it into something richer. It is also somewhat like baptism, whose liturgies explicitly rehearse a unity of loss and gain. Or Christ's sacrifice, or the Eucharist, or a whole range of phenomena that lie

at the heart of Christian life and thought, and whose patterns guide Hegel's thinking.

The second part of this section evokes the slow-moving tableau of spirit in history. The motion exhibited is not that of stimulus and response, or even that of learning and transmitting wisdom from one generation to the next. It is more like the formation and dissolution of epochs or entire civilizations. Spirit here is not merely adapting to its circumstances but assimilating *the whole* of its encompassing structure.

Since its consummation consists in spirit's completely *knowing* what *it is*, in spirit *knowing* its substance, this knowledge is its *taking-the-inward-turn* within which spirit forsakes its existence and gives its shape over to recollection. In taking-the-inward-turn, spirit is absorbed into the night of its self-consciousness, but its vanished existence is preserved in that night, and this sublated existence – the existence which was prior but is now newborn from knowledge – is the new existence, a new world, and a new shape of spirit. (§808)

Indem seine Vollendung darin besteht, das, was *er ist*, seine Substanz, vollkommen zu *wissen*, so ist dies Wissen sein *In-sich-gehen*, in welchem er sein Dasein verläßt und seine Gestalt der Erinnerung übergibt. In seinem In-sich-gehen ist er in der Nacht seines Selbst-bewußtseins versunken, sein verschwundnes Dasein aber ist in ihr aufbewahrt, und dies aufgehobne Dasein – das vorige, aber aus dem Wissen neugeborne – ist das neue Dasein, eine neue Welt und Geistesgestalt. (*PhG* 433)

The consummation (or completion: *Vollendung*) of spirit is, characteristically, a matter of what Hegel calls “form” more than it is “content”: it is its knowing what it is, not simply its becoming or being what it is. Such a completion relates to Hegel's Aristotelianism, in which potentiality and actuality are taken up into a final form in which subject and substance, thinking and being, are united. Here, one particular aspect is emphasized: the journey inward. This claim poses some challenges to Hegel's interpreters. It is pretty clear from what has preceded this section that the movement exhibited in the *Phenomenology* is from consciousness (a concern with objects) to self-consciousness (a discovery that all relation to objects is by the self) to absolute knowing (a unity of consciousness and self-consciousness, in which false oppositions are overcome). It is most unlikely that Hegel is here suggesting that the consummation of spirit is a regression to the second, merely self-conscious, stage. Yet the text will not permit one to say that the journey inward is not a journey into self-consciousness. The plain

sense of “spirit is absorbed into the night of its self-consciousness” demands that some account of self-consciousness is given here, particularly given the domination of self-consciousness that is implied. Hegel perhaps means to draw attention to the *thinking* that forms the legacy of past shapes of spirit. For the philosopher the deposit of history is the categories in which we deal. We are concerned here, Hegel says, with “vanished existence” (*verschwindnes Dasein*) in which something is preserved or stored (*aufbewahrt*). Once again there is the complex relation between loss and gain that so fascinates Hegel.

The gain, Hegel says, is a new shape of spirit. This is a particularly challenging claim for my interpretation of absolute knowing, because one of my central claims is that Hegel’s emphasis is logical, and that he takes everyday thinking seriously and does not think that technical philosophical forms of thinking replace forms of everyday thinking in ordinary social space. A new shape of spirit does not sound like a technical matter for philosophers. It sounds like a new epoch that permeates an entire culture. I confess I find this puzzling.⁴⁴ The conclusion seems unavoidable: Hegel is claiming that spirit that knows itself is not primarily a matter of logic and a form of philosophical science available to the kinds of readers who can work their way through the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, but is a new social-historical formation. It seems equally unavoidable to point out that Hegel was uncharacteristically optimistic. Even our intelligentsia does not operate anywhere near the level of sophistication reached by Hegel in this work, let alone our entire late modern epoch. We live in an epoch in which opinion is more valuable than truth, and where the self is overwhelmingly set in opposition to the other in an orgy of competitiveness, growing divisions between rich and poor, rampant short-termism in relation to the environment, and the erosion of social solidarities. Hegel foresaw a different future which we do not inhabit. (But Hegel was a Christian, and thus perhaps he sees a perpetually available alternative to our damaged life: even if we constantly refuse it, it always remains a possibility. In worship it is repeatedly performed, even if those who regularly perform it then routinely refuse it.)

⁴⁴ H.S. Harris evokes Plato in his discussion of “the republic of the learned,” in which Hegel’s vision is of a culture permeated by absolute knowing (Harris, *Hegels Ladder*, pp. 708–763, esp. p. 752). Andrew Shanks (evoking Marx) offers a strikingly contrasting discussion of “the solidarity of the shaken,” in which it is the community of reconciliation that characterizes this new shape of spirit (Shanks, *Hegel and Religious Faith: Divided Brain, Atoning Spirit* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 2011), pp. 27–31, 162–165). O’Regan offers a nuanced account of how this account of “a detachable select group” makes Hegel’s approach to transcendence ambiguous: O’Regan, *The Heterodox Hegel* (New York: SUNY, 1994), pp. 289–290.

Within that new shape of spirit, it likewise has to begin all over again without prejudice in its immediacy, and from its immediacy to rear itself once again to maturity, as if all that had preceded it were lost to it and as if it were to have learned nothing from the experience of the preceding spirits. However, that *inwardizing re-collection* has preserved that experience; it is what is inner, and it is in fact the higher form of substance. However much therefore this spirit begins its cultural development all over again and seems to start merely from itself, still it is at the same time making its beginning at a higher level. (§808)

In ihr hat er ebenso unbefangen von vornen bei ihrer Unmittelbarkeit anzufangen und sich von ihr auf wieder großzuziehen, als ob alles Vorhergehende für ihn verloren wäre und er aus der Erfahrung der frühern Geister nichts gelernt hätte. Aber die *Er-Innerung* hat sie aufbewahrt und ist das Innre und die in der Tat höhere Form der Substanz. Wenn also dieser Geist seine Bildung, von sich nur auszugehen scheinend, wieder von vornen anfängt, so ist es zugleich auf einer höhern Stufe, daß er anfängt. (*PhG* 433)

The new shape of spirit is presuppositionless. That is a sign that Hegel is thinking ahead to what will become the *Science of Logic*. If the claim that the concerns of that future inquiry are embodied in a shape of spirit (and not just in a book) are optimistic (or at least eschatological), the concerns themselves deserve to be taken seriously nonetheless. Hegel is outlining the kind of inquiry that will proceed without taking its basic terms for granted: it is a fundamental inquiry into the categories which guide our thinking. The striking feature of this section, however, remains its concern with *cultural development*, as if this is a social action; Hegel's later aspirations will be somewhat more restrained. Indeed his *Science of Logic*, in which these concerns are articulated, will arguably become his least-read book. The *Phenomenology of Spirit* remains an enduringly popular work; as an advertisement for the *Science of Logic* it must be judged a failure.

The realm of spirits, having formed itself in this way within existence, constitutes a sequence in which one spirit replaced the other, and each succeeding spirit took over from the previous spirit the realm of that spirit's world. The goal of the movement is the revelation of depth

Das Geisterreich, das auf diese Weise sich in dem Dasein gebildet, macht eine Aufeinanderfolge aus, worin einer den andern ablöste und jeder das Reich der Welt von dem vorhergehenden übernahm. Ihr Ziel ist die Offenbarung der Tiefe, und diese ist *der absolute Begriff*, diese

itself, and this is *the absolute concept*. This revelation is thereby the sublation of its depth, that is, its *extension*, the negativity of this I existing-within-itself, which is its self-emptying, that is, its substance – and is its *time*. In itself, this self-emptying empties itself of itself and, in that way, exists within its extension as well as within its depth, within the self. (§808)

Offenbarung ist hiemit das Aufheben seiner Tiefe oder seine *Ausdehnung*, die Negativität dieses insichseienden Ich, welche seine Entäußerung oder Substanz ist, – und seine *Zeit*, daß diese Entäußerung sich an ihr selbst entäußert und so in ihrer Ausdehnung ebenso in ihrer Tiefe, dem Selbst ist. (*PhG* 433)

If the *Phenomenology* (and history thus far) have been a matter of sequential progression and supersession, a goal can be discerned that is not a sequence, but a depth. Instead of being concerned with the succession of one thing after another, one can be concerned at a deeper and more abstract level with what succession is, and how its own logic can be displayed. Hegel here calls it the “absolute concept.” As we shall see in the next chapter, he later refers to it as the “absolute idea.”

The “sublation [*Aufhebung*] of its depth” will be a concern not primarily with how particular forms of thinking are exhibited in particular social practices, but with the technical matter of identifying the formal structures that are at work in that thinking. This will no longer be a *Phenomenology of Spirit* but a philosophical inquiry into logic. It will not be an inquiry into how one shape negates another, through events of self-emptying, in time. It will be an inquiry into negation, into self-emptying, into time. Hegel uses the odd, somewhat vertiginous expression, “self-emptying empties itself of itself,” which I interpret to be a display of just how astringent such thinking will be. At the same time it is noticeable that Hegel characteristically refuses to pit extension against depth. They are not placed in opposition, but in what he would call a “unity,” signified here by the everyday word *ebenso*. Self-emptying will “be” in a way that is “in” extension *as well as* “in” depth. What is grasped in “deep” logic is not opposed to what is laid out in “extended” history.

It is worth drawing attention to one feature of this that is utterly characteristic of Hegel’s thinking, and that will strike many readers today as utterly implausible: it is the unwavering commitment to the view that what we see in history is indeed graspable as logic. *History is rational*. This is an aspect of Hegel’s thinking that will trouble later figures, especially those like Horkheimer and Adorno who (following Weber, who himself follows Nietzsche) see rationality bound up with bureaucracy, authoritarianism, and the impoverishment of love and friendship. But it is not obvious that Hegel’s

way of thinking about history is wholly different from the deeply negative assessments made by his successors. When Hegel insists that history is graspable as logic, he is not committed to the view that things are for the best, or that the sense they make is a cheerful stroll into the dawn. Hegel may be committed to this view, and some read certain passages in the *Philosophy of Right* in this way, but that is not because of his thinking about the relation of history and logic. One can take this more narrowly, and simply suggest that the way people make sense of the world (and they do make sense of it) is via a complex organic tissue of shifting categories that are connected by a variety of logics *and that it is possible to describe the categories, identify the processes of change, and classify the logics that connect them*. History is rational in the sense that the deposits it leaves, as categories and as logics, can be described, identified, and classified. That leaves quite open the question whether what is rational, what is ordered, is for the best. Any order may be better than disorder; but that does not mean that all order is equally good. Hegel may have been deeply conservative, but this was not because of his interest in logic.

The goal, absolute knowledge, that is, spirit knowing itself as spirit, has its path in the recollection of spirits as they are in themselves and as they achieve the organization of their realm. Their preservation in terms of their free-standing existence appearing in the form of contingency is history, but in terms of their conceptually grasped organization, it is the *science of phenomenal knowledge*. Both together are conceptually grasped history; they form the recollection and the Golgotha of absolute spirit, the actuality, the truth, the certainty of its throne, without which it would be lifeless and alone; only – Out of the chalice of this realm of spirits Foams forth to him his infinity. (§808)

Das Ziel, das absolute Wissen, oder der sich als Geist wissende Geist hat zu seinem Wege die Erinnerung der Geister, wie sie an ihnen selbst sind und die Organisation ihres Reiches vollbringen. Ihre Aufbewahrung nach der Seite ihres freien in der Form der Zufälligkeit erscheinenden Daseins ist die Geschichte, nach der Seite ihrer begriffnen Organisation aber die *Wissenschaft des erscheinenden Wissens*; beide zusammen, die begriffne Geschichte, bilden die Erinnerung und die Schädelstätte des absoluten Geistes, die Wirklichkeit, Wahrheit und Gewißheit seines Throns, ohne den er das leblose Einsame wäre; nur – aus dem Kelche dieses Geisterreiches schäumt ihm seine Unendlichkeit. (*PhG* 433–434)

Hegel here offers a further nuance to this account of the relation of extension and depth, or of history and of knowledge. The path to absolute knowing is

traversed through recollection – through thinking historically, and thinking about history. In terms of “free-standing” (*frei*) being, which discerns their (genuine) contingency, we have to do with history. In terms of their structure (*begriffne Organisation*) we have to do with philosophical investigation (*Wissenschaft*). They can be taken together as *begriffne Geschichte*, for which we might use Hegel’s later term: a philosophy of history.

This embrace of both dimensions exhibits, one last time, Hegel’s insistence on a complex and generative relation between gain and loss (this way round, this time): it is the recollection (*Erinnerung*) and the Golgotha (*Schädelstätte*) – the place of the skull, the site of the crucifixion, the emblem of all that dies.

Taken together, both in gain and in loss, and in their relation to one another that is more than the one or the other, three of Hegel’s terms are combined in a unity. One comes from Aristotle, one from St John’s Gospel, and one from Hegel’s own account of philosophy: actuality (*Wirklichkeit*); truth (*Wahrheit*); certainty (*Gewißheit*). At this stage of the argument the meanings of the individual words are almost vanishingly insignificant beside the relation that they display to one another. They are distinct in inseparable relation. They are expressed in one final display of Chalcedonian logic.

It is followed by a re-authoring of two lines from Schiller’s poem *Friendship* from 1782. The final stanza of the original is as follows:

Freundlos war der grosse Weltenmeister,
Fühlte Mangel – darum schuf er Geister,
 Sel’ge Spiegel seiner Seligkeit!
Fand das höchste Wesen schon kein gleiches,
Aus dem Kelch des ganzen Seelenreiches
 Schäumt ihm – die Unendlichkeit.

In literal, unpoetic translation:

Friendless was the great master of the world,
He felt lack – and so created spirits,
 Blessed mirrors of his blessedness!
The highest being found no equal,
Out of the chalice of the whole realm of souls
 Foams to him – infinity.

Hegel evokes a realm of spirits rather than of souls. The *ihm* and *seine* of the last line, as Hegel quotes it, are indeterminate. They are pronouns without a reference. It is left vague to whom it is that a chalice of spirits foams not just infinity but *his* or *its* infinity. For Schiller these pronouns refer to “the highest being”; perhaps for Hegel too; perhaps not.

But most important, as so often in Hegel, is the relation between two terms and not the meaning of the terms in isolation. Hegel invokes Golgotha and then immediately invokes the chalice. This is not just a relation between loss and gain (now back in this order) but between the deepest possible loss and the most tangible yet intangible gain. The chalice, the grail, is the most tantalizing object: utterly present, held in the hand; yet also the ever-elusive, the object of an unending quest.

The Absolute Idea

This chapter will interpret the closing part of Hegel's *Science of Logic*, the chapter entitled "The Absolute Idea" (*Die absolute Idee*). Hegel's *Science of Logic* was published between 1812 and 1816 in two parts, the first on "objective logic" and the second on "subjective" logic. These two parts contain three "doctrines": of being (*Sein*), of essence (*Wesen*), of concept (*Begriff*). The first volume of the first part, the doctrine of being, was revised by Hegel in the year of his death and published in 1832: the remaining revisions were never completed. We are thus concerned with a portion of the work from the earlier period.

The text we are concerned with here is the best available paperback critical edition, edited by Hans-Jürgen Gawoll, and published by Felix Meiner in 1994. Before this the standard text was Lasson's edition published in 1923, followed by volume 5 of the *Werke*, edited by Moldenhauer and Michel, and published by Suhrkamp in 1969, and then volume 12 of the *Gesammelte Werke*, edited by Hogemann and Jaeschke and published by Felix Meiner in 1981 (on which the Gawoll edition is based). This last-named is generally referred to as the "historical-critical" or the "collected works" edition, and is the standard critical scholarly edition. There is not a vast difference between the different editions, other than their pagination: this is a perpetual irritant for those seeking to follow scholarship which refers to different editions. The Lasson edition was translated by A.V. Miller and published in 1969; the same edition was translated by George di Giovanni and published by Cambridge University Press in 2010. Most students reading in English will have relied upon Miller's translation, and this is the translation that appears, with some emendations, in Stephen Houlgate's commentary of the opening of Hegel's logic, which covers pages 67–150 of the Miller

translation, and the corresponding German text from the Suhrkamp edition. There are thus four German editions in play, and two English translations. Scholarship is a practical activity, and scholars make use of the materials that they can readily locate, and which they can afford. The expense of volumes is an issue in the study of this particular text, especially for students. The 1981 German edition currently costs around €200 per volume, and the Giovanni translation retails at \$190 and £125. These are only available in cloth binding. By contrast the less critically complete Suhrkamp edition volumes cost €14 (and are also available on a handy CD ROM), and the Miller translation can be had for under \$30 – these editions are in paperback. There are also freely available online versions, through Projekt Gutenberg and marxists.org.¹ There is nothing wrong with the earlier German editions (although they contain much less apparatus), but the Miller translation does not reflect now-standard renderings of certain Hegelian words (e.g. “concept” for *Begriff*), and it contains no apparatus whatsoever, so the brave student is thus somewhat on his or her own. The bewildering number of editions of the *Phenomenology* is not as great a problem as it is for the *Science of Logic*, owing to the increasingly standard use of paragraph numbers for commentary and discussion rather than page numbers (which obviously vary from edition to edition). One can more easily consult whichever edition of the *Phenomenology* one has to hand, when considering claims by an interpreter. There is no such luck in the case of the *Science of Logic*: one must rely on the use of section headings, where an interpreter has thought to include them, and hope for the best. The Gawoll edition I have used very helpfully includes the pagination from the 1981 critical edition in its margins, and my page numbers refer to those of the critical edition, not to Gawoll’s own pagination. I have used Gawoll for two reasons: it is available in paperback and it seems to me wise to use an edition which students can afford; and it uses contemporary orthography, with *Seyn* given as *Sein* etc. This has no effect on the meaning of the text, as far as I can see, but it has a huge effect on its readability. I am very grateful for its existence. The translation of the final chapter is my own; in the earlier sections I have used

¹ For volume 1 in German, see <http://gutenberg.spiegel.de/buch/1653/1>. The source for this text is not given, but it appears to be the same as that named for volume 2. For volume 2 in German see <http://gutenberg.spiegel.de/buch/1654/1>. The source is named as that published by Duncker & Humblot in 1841, which would make it the edition edited by Leopold von Henning and originally published in 1834. For an online English version, see the rather fascinating Marxist resource http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/hegel/hl_index.htm, which identifies which passages from the *Science of Logic* were copied out by Lenin in his *Philosophical Notebooks*. The edition they have posted is Miller’s translation. Students of the *Science of Logic* should beware the Marxist transcription, however, because it edits out certain material without any indication: the text is by no means complete. All links last accessed 7 Jan. 2012.

George di Giovanni's translation and given the corresponding location in Miller's translation in the footnotes.

Theologians do not, by and large, read the *Science of Logic*. There are obstacles to doing so, even before one confronts the difficulty of the text. Only one of the translations has an index (Giovanni's – the index is a magnificent accomplishment in itself), which is probably one of the most useful tools an interpreter can have in the case of a long and intricate text like this one. There are so many editions in circulation that it is a headache to keep track of what exactly is being discussed in which text (until one knows the text so well that one no longer needs the citation information – which is not much use for students starting out). If one then braves the text itself (whichever edition one has to hand) it is formidably difficult, and when one turns to the secondary literature (which is vast) there is no consensus even on what kind of project Hegel is engaged in, let alone on matters of detail. It is not surprising that theologians, by and large, read the *Phenomenology* (or at least parts of it) and then turn, with guilty relief, to the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, which are much less strenuous going (although it is often wrongly read as a work of theology – an approach to which I shall offer a bold alternative in the next chapter of the present study). Martin De Nys' recent *Hegel and Theology*, which presents a very friendly and common-sense approach to its subject matter, offers an overview of the penultimate chapter of the *Phenomenology* and in the next chapter treats the *Lectures* – in both cases with clarificatory footnote references to the *Encyclopaedia Logic*, but (perhaps wisely in view of the readership) offers nothing on the *Science of Logic*. Wendte takes an unusual approach, and leaves the *Phenomenology* to one side, preferring to interpret the *Science of Logic* and the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*.

Theologians should read the *Science of Logic*, without getting too dispirited by the scholarly tangles that accompany its interpretation. Its difficulty largely stems from the fact that it is a text that deals in logic, and presupposes that one is familiar with the questions that are asked and answered in Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* and Fichte's *Science of Knowledge*. Theologians are expected to know about Kant's first *Critique*, even if it is considered a matter of specialization to read it slowly. No such burden arises in the case of Fichte's *Science of Knowledge*: in divinity schools almost no one reads it. That means there are excuses available for not tackling Hegel's *Science of Logic*, which is 800-odd pages long, after all. Not knowing (or knowing well enough) the particular texts that form the backdrop to Hegel's magnum opus is admittedly an obstacle. But this is a trifling matter besides the much bigger problem, which theologians are in the main too polite to mention: that few if any theological graduate courses in any university offer serious training in logic. Theologians who want to learn logic are by and large given a campus map with an arrow indicating the philosophy faculty. This would

work well if the philosophers were curious about the relation between theology and philosophy, or showed interest in the theological tradition that generated most of the philosophy of which they are the guardians. Some do. Most do not. It is not good for theologians to learn their philosophy from philosophers who do not understand theology, because the philosophy they learn is stripped of what is most vital to theology, namely the ways in which philosophers up until the twentieth century were centrally concerned with theological questions. But even in happy cases when theologians find themselves taught by theologically sympathetic philosophers, it is most unlikely they will be reading Hegel's *Science of Logic*. It's all French phenomenology these days (no matter that the French phenomenologists know their Hegel, and say so).

What is so good about the *Science of Logic*? It is an investigation into the structure of logic, that is, the rules which govern thinking. If one reads the table of contents, one might get the impression that the book is about "being," "essence," "concept" (in its broadest outlines) with subordinate investigations into finitude, infinity, magnitude, measure, reflection, appearance, the absolute, subjectivity, classes of judgment, objectivity, cognition, and finally the absolute idea. That is a misleading impression. Hegel's *Science of Logic* is not primarily an investigation into being or anything like that. Neither is it an investigation into God, for that matter, although Hegel does from time to time (although not at the start of the *Science of Logic*) say that the study of philosophy is in the final analysis concerned with God. It is an investigation into thinking.

Hegel is a modern philosopher, which means he inherits problems from Descartes, Spinoza, assorted rationalists, empiricists, and common-sense-ists, and above all from Kant and his immediate successors in Germany. To be a modern philosopher, for Hegel, is to refer *everything* to the subject. That is the practice of modern philosophy, and it is Hegel's practice too. But Hegel offers a twist: he thinks that errant logics guide modern philosophy, and that the most grievous errant logics are those which produce false oppositions between "thinking" and "being," "subject" and "object," "concept" and "representation." We were concerned with these false oppositions in the *Phenomenology*. When Hegel refers everything to the subject he is not doing away with the object, or reducing everything to the subject. He is, rather, doing away with what one might call the "God's-eye view." Now *this* should be of interest to theologians.

For philosophers of Hegel's generation, it was obvious that the problem with pre-Kantian philosophy was that it wanted to attain a God's-eye view of reality. Philosophy from Descartes, through Leibniz, to the early Kant had an idea of how things look from God's perspective, and assigned to philosophy the task of getting as close as possible to acquiring that perspective. The very conception of "truth" was understood to be truth as God sees it. Humans

don't see things the way God sees them, admittedly, but the criterion of truth, by which human knowledge is to be measured, is truth the way God sees it. The overwhelming significance of Kant's philosophy is that it says NO to this conception of truth, and this conception of philosophy. We instantly knock against two significant cultural problems here.

The first is the more serious one: most ordinary people are not Kantians, and that means that they generally conceive of truth as the God's-eye view. This conception is signaled by one of the most philosophically interesting of all short words: "really." "Yes, but did the moon landings *really* happen?" Or that most numbing of examples which still blights the philosophy classroom: "Yes, but is the table *really* there?" The word "really" is a sign that the questioner conceives of truth as the God's-eye view, and is going to measure any claim against that criterion. Generally, the massive failure of this criterion to satisfy the earnest hope of the freshman student propels him or her either into analytic philosophy (where one arguably seeks clarity, more than truth) or into popular forms of continental philosophy (where one unmasks apparent claims to truth for the dark art of rhetoric they "really" are). In either case, truth fades into a distant dream tinged with disappointment. Hegel is interested in truth. That should interest theologians too. But to ordinary people, it doesn't seem that he can be, because he never tells you whether the table is *really* there. His "failure," however, stems from giving up (like Kant) on the God's-eye view of truth. Theologians should give it up too, and the more theological they are, the more thoroughly they should give it up.

The second is less serious, but pervasive nonetheless: it is that theologians are taught (in ways that can be rather easily demonstrated) that Kant is the bad guy. Younger theologians used to be taught this by older theologians who had read Kant. Those younger theologians are now the older theologians, and having taken their teachers at their word, they did not waste their precious student years actually reading Kant. "I don't need to read Kant. I read ____" (some contemporary figure who demolishes Kant, from a safe distance from the text). Kant is still the bad guy, for the newer generation of teachers, but they mean by this something different from what the prior generations meant. Those earlier teachers meant that Kant's prohibition on knowledge of God in his theoretical philosophy, that his refusal to take imitation seriously in his moral philosophy, that his reduction of Christ to a moral exemplar in his religious philosophy: that these (and others) are all problems for theology. And indeed they surely are. Their critiques of Kant are actually rather close to Hegel's. (That should interest theologians.) But when their pupils teach that Kant is the bad guy, they do not mean this. They often mean that Kantian philosophy is bad philosophy and that it does not merit serious study. This lack of serious study has become endemic at the same time as excellent commentaries on Kant's works are available as never

before (a chain of excellence set in motion in 1983 with the publication of Henry Allison's *Kant's Transcendental Idealism*). Even if one is armed with a superb bibliography of the best scholarship on Kant, it is hard to persuade theologians that, yes, Kant's philosophy poses problems for theology but, no, it is a mistake to refuse to read him: Kant still merits deep investigation. So long as theologians associate Kant with "No to knowledge of God" rather than "No to the God's-eye view" this is unlikely to change. Kant said both things, but the second is infinitely more important – and more generative for theology – than the first. Hegel says "No to the God's-eye view" and "Yes to knowledge of God." How much more interesting to theologians could he be?

The observation here is not primarily that Kant deserves to be taught on theology courses (that is a battle for another day) but that his absence from them poses a severe obstacle to meaningful engagements with Hegel. It is formidably difficult to interpret Hegel's texts without some familiarity with the *Critique of Pure Reason* and the *Critique of Practical Reason*. As Kant slips from undergraduate programs in theology and religious studies, it will be difficult to sustain anything but the most superficial engagements with Hegel at graduate level in those departments. This chapter attempts to show how a more detailed engagement even with a seemingly untheological text by Hegel is generative for theological thinking, and tries to show why the tradition from Kant to Hegel remains worthy of serious study.

The *Science of Logic* is an investigation into thinking. The clue is in the name: it is about logic. It is an investigation into thinking which presumes that humans are humans, rather than ersatz gods. If Kant had called his first critique *Philosophy for Humans, and how it goes wrong when they think they are angels* he might be more widely read (and not just quoted) by theologians. If Hegel had called his big book *Human thinking is the only thinking that counts, and here is how it works* that might attract a broader readership. But Hegel had no need of marketing: his investigations into logic were intended for a readership that had already proven receptive to the *Phenomenology* and his lecture halls were packed in the 1820s. It is only in the twenty-first century that a song and dance routine is needed to entice people to open his books.

In what follows, I offer commentary on a tiny portion of the *Science of Logic*: the last twenty or so pages of the final volume, and indeed with a focus on just the first two of those pages. I proceed on the basis already indicated: that the book (including the final chapter) is about human thinking and how it works.

Language has no outside. This is a twentieth-century formulation, but it is an apt slogan to bear in mind when reading Hegel, who would wholeheartedly endorse it. All human thinking is discursive, linguistic, judicial. If one holds on to a God's-eye view of truth, then one is always on a quest to

access it. Because human thinking is discursive, and because access to the God's-eye view cannot possibly be discursive, philosophy seeking the God's-eye view will have to adopt other kinds of approach than the discursive. In the technical language of German Idealism, it will need to be some kind of "intuition" (*Anschaung*). Intuition is a vague word that just means "other than discursive." Kant insisted that human thinking is discursive all the way down. Hegel agrees. If there are to be appeals to intuition (and Hegel has a more "ethnographic" interest than Kant in the fact that there are such appeals in philosophy) then these cannot be load-bearing for human thinking, especially for forms of thinking that exhibit disagreement.

It is hard to avoid the word "metaphysical" when dealing with Hegel's *Science of Logic*. There is much scholarly debate about whether Hegel's project is metaphysical or not. This obviously turns on what one means by "metaphysical." I take the view that Hegel is broadly Aristotelian. That is, he makes a distinction between investigations into phenomena (in Aristotelian terms: *Physics*) and investigations simultaneously into phenomena and the categories which structure our thinking about them (in Aristotelian terms: *Metaphysics*). The *Science of Logic* is an investigation into the categories which structure our thinking, but it is undertaken in a way that its investigations into phenomena are attenuated. (Hegel does not talk enough about phenomena when he is talking about thinking.) It might as well be called metaphysics, for that reason. Hegel's attempt is apt to mislead – this is a product of his decision to eliminate the simultaneous investigation into categories *and* phenomena, and to focus exclusively on the categories – but one needs to take seriously the brilliance of Hegel's investigation as it stands, and to recognize that even if there are few explicit investigations into phenomena, it is such investigations that are conditions of the possibility of a text like the *Science of Logic*, and which in fact form the focus of his next set of studies into nature.

How one understands metaphysics, however, will depend on how one engages the whole question of the God's-eye view. If one takes the God's-eye view to be the criterion of truth, then one's metaphysical inquiries will take on a certain quality. They will be investigations into how reality *really* is, and once this question is settled the remaining task will be to fit objects in the world into the bigger picture. Recalling an earlier discussion let us again call this "epic" metaphysics. If one rejects the God's-eye view as the criterion of truth, and instead assumes that human thinking is discursive all the way down, and that human thinking is the only thinking that counts, then one's metaphysical inquiries will be quite different. They will be investigations into how we *think* about reality, and as clarity is gained on this question, the task will be to show how our talk about objects in the world is structured by this thinking. Let us again name this "dramatic" metaphysics.

Epic metaphysics begins at the beginning and wants to get to the bottom of things, so that it can then build up. Dramatic metaphysics begins in the middle, and wants to make headway outwards, to make sense of more and more things. Epic metaphysics seems a rather vertical activity. Dramatic metaphysics is more horizontal. Epic metaphysics will probably make “intuition” central at some point or other. Dramatic metaphysics may limit itself to the “discursive.” Epic metaphysics may be quite “representational” once it is satisfied with its “picture” of reality. Dramatic metaphysics may be quite “conceptual” because it may deny that “reality” is the kind of thing which can be “pictured.” Both epic and dramatic metaphysics may make rather different appeals to aesthetic activity, and to what the products of art disclose about the world. For epic metaphysics art may offer some kind of “intuition” into how reality *really* is. For dramatic metaphysics, art may offer some alternative to “thinking” as a way of structuring our encounter with reality, which is nonetheless cognitive in some sense.

Is Hegel metaphysical? Yes, in the sense that he investigates the categories which structure human thinking about reality. Is his metaphysics “epic” or “dramatic” in my scheme? I interpret it as dramatic, and in this I follow the lead of Stephen Houlgate and others. But there are many respectable interpreters who attribute a more epic approach to him. The best thing is to read the text and try both ways of interpreting it. I shall offer a dramatic reading, as it were. Others are possible.

The Shape of the Text

Beginning at the end of Hegel’s *Science of Logic* is beset with disadvantages compared with working one’s way through the text until one arrives at the end. We are constrained by what is possible in a study of this kind. We are constrained by space and by what can be accomplished in a single chapter, especially as I wish to engage the text in a little detail, rather than offer only a broad overview. We are also constrained by the topic: our interest is in the part in which Hegel’s thinking might seem to cause problems for a Christian theology which takes seriously the reality of divine grace. If the *Science of Logic* is anywhere in danger of collapsing the distinction between divine and human action, it is surely in the chapter on “the absolute idea” at the end of the book. So that is where we should look.

Some account of the text as a whole is necessary, and some account of what kind of project Hegel has is probably helpful.² The first thing to say about the *Science of Logic* is that it is not intended as an abstruse piece of

² I recommend Stephen Houlgate’s excellent *The Opening of Hegel’s Logic: From Being to Infinity* (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 2006) as a persuasive account of what Hegel

thinking that is independent of our ordinary orientation in the world. It is concerned with thinking, and if one wonders whose thinking this is, then the answer can only be, for Hegel, “anyone who uses language.” The second thing to say is that Hegel is not only interested in “analyzing” concepts, that is, in making sense of their component elements. He is also interested in “synthesizing” (my word, not his) them, that is, in making sense of how they are related to each other. Words do not have meanings, for Hegel: they have relations. (The words in view here are those that form the focus of the text’s investigations, beginning with words like “being” and “nothing.”) An investigation into logic is thus, for Hegel, not primarily an investigation into the meanings of terms, and their operations. It is an investigation into the complex ecologies of mutual implication, combination, and generation. The third thing to say is that Hegel very often identifies errant logics as those which produce one-sidedness, rather than producing mistakes pure and simple. A simple mistake might be an incorrect logical operation. But a one-sidedness is not a simple mistake. It might be an act that is fine, so far as it goes, but fails to do justice to some further dimension. He is also interested in pairs of terms, and often identifies errant logics as those which falsely reduce one item in a pair to the other, or which falsely opposes the one term to the other. We have seen some examples of such pairs in the previous chapter.

To grasp that Hegel is investigating pairs *as pairs* is not a sufficient insight into what Hegel is doing in the *Science of Logic*, but it is (in my view) a necessary one. If one *only* talks of pairs, one will gain the misleading view that somehow there is an ecology of inter-related concepts, which the investigation gradually uncovers. Such a reading certainly has the virtue, if that is what it is, of making *The Science of Logic* rather less bizarre than it otherwise might appear. But it also fails to do justice to a curious word that shows up from the start, and keeps on appearing at crucial points. That word is “motion” or “movement” (*Bewegung*) and, later on, “self-movement” (*Selbstbewegung*). Any word that keeps showing up, and which does so at crucial junctures, is *prima facie* one that calls for attention and care.

There are two ways, at least, of grasping the meaning of “movement” in the *Science of Logic*. The first is to attribute movement to the thinking of the investigator: as we investigate logic, “we,” the thinkers, experience movement in our insights, and we “come to see” things differently as our thinking “moves” from insight to insight. That is certainly a common-sense

means by an investigation “without presuppositions,” and its influence will be apparent in my account here. John Burbidge’s *The Logic of Hegel’s Logic: An Introduction* (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview, 2006) is also a useful orientation, as is George di Giovanni’s introduction to his translation of the text.

way of interpreting what is going on. The second is to attribute movement to logic itself, and to attribute it to logic because it is already attributed to being. This second approach does much better justice to the plain sense of Hegel's text, as it happens. Hegel thinks that the world about which we think displays movement, and that the logics which guide that thinking display it too. If there is any doubt about this, Hegel makes it explicit at the start of his inquiry:

... the emptiness of the logical forms [in some forms of philosophy] lies rather solely in the manner in which they are considered and dealt with. Scattered in fixed determinations and thus not held together in organic unity, they are dead forms and the spirit which is their vital concrete unity does not reside in them.³

This is the first clue in the *Science of Logic* that the investigation which follows is going to be not only into unity (and thus into pairs, and not just independent terms), but into "living, concrete unity." Logical forms, for Hegel, are not "fixed determinations" but are displays of life of some kind. Hegel explicitly connects this with his previous inquiry five years previously:

In the *Phenomenology of Spirit* I have presented consciousness as it progresses from the first immediate opposition of itself and the subject matter to absolute knowing. This path traverses all the forms of the *relation of consciousness to the object* and its result is the *concept of science*.⁴

This thus describes the "movement" of consciousness, whose adventures the *Phenomenology* investigates. It might be tempting to think that movement applies, in that case, only to consciousness, that it is a predicate of thinking only. But the problem with this view is that the whole point of the *Phenomenology* is to display the ways in which the false opposition between being and thinking must be overcome, in absolute knowing (which we considered in some detail in the previous chapter). Being and thinking are a pair: they can (and must) be distinguished, but one can only do justice to each term by doing justice to its relation to the other. To speak of "spirit" is to speak in a way that does justice to this relation. Notice that in the previous citation Hegel speaks of "the spirit which is their vital concrete unity." In other words, the reader of the *Science of Logic* will misread the text, and misread it rather thoroughly, if "movement" is attributed to thinking and

³ G.W.F. Hegel, *The Science of Logic* (ed. and tr. G. di Giovanni, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 27; *Science of Logic* (tr. A.V. Miller, London: Allen & Unwin, 1969), p. 48. The text comes from the Introduction.

⁴ Hegel, *The Science of Logic* (di Giovanni), p. 28; *Science of Logic* (Miller), p. 48. I have amended *das absolute Wissen* as absolute knowing, rather than knowledge.

not to being. Movement is to be attributed to spirit, which is the “life” in which thinking and being are always in relation to each other.

This study is not an overview of Hegel, nor an account of the development of his thought, and in general I have not placed texts in the history of ideas. This is one area, however, where it is useful to have a sense of how Hegel conceives various kinds of inquiry. My account here is simplified.⁵ Hegel characteristically distinguishes philosophical inquiries into three domains: logic, nature, and spirit. We might gloss these as inquiries into the rules that guide thinking (logic), into the natural world as understood in what we today call “science” (nature) and into the social world as understood in the humanities, with a focus on ethics and religion (spirit). As a matter of his own intellectual development, over a ten-year period, Hegel wrote the *Phenomenology of Spirit* first, then the *Science of Logic*, and then his account of the philosophy of nature which appeared as the second volume of the *Encyclopaedia*. These domains are only distinct, and not separate, from each other, for two obvious reasons: first, inquiries into logic and nature are alike the fruits of spirit; second, the social world obviously emerges from the natural world and any thinking that humans display is obviously an example of “the natural” doing some thinking. It is this latter insight, which is basically Aristotelian, and which was radically developed by Schelling, that leads Hegel to talk about the substance being subject in the *Phenomenology*. It is also why it is a mistake to think that Hegel sees what goes on in “logic” as being independent of what goes on in “nature” (which is what Descartes thought). It is important to be aware that motion is a feature of all three fields of inquiry: the concept displays it, nature displays it, and spirit displays it.

The Christian tradition displays a long history of speech about motion, where discourse about motion functions precisely as discourse about the unity of various human inquiries. The logic of “motion” is the logic of inquiry itself.⁶ Hegel himself belongs to this tradition and reaches back behind the narrower conceptions of Newtonian physics to this older way of thinking.⁷ In this respect Hegel is a decidedly “medieval” thinker, and this

⁵ For good accounts see Terry Pinkard, *Hegel: A Biography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), and di Giovanni’s superb introduction to the development of Hegel’s logic: *The Science of Logic* (di Giovanni), pp. xiv–xxvii.

⁶ This is argued in Simon Oliver’s 2003 doctoral dissertation at Cambridge, which subsequently appeared as *Philosophy, God and Motion* (London: Routledge, 2005). Oliver considers this topic in the thought of Plato, Aristotle, Grosseteste, (Roger) Bacon, Aquinas, and finally Newton.

⁷ This is argued in Michael Buckley’s 1967 doctoral dissertation at Chicago, which subsequently appeared as *Motion and Motion’s God: Thematic Variations in Aristotle, Cicero, Newton, and Hegel* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971). Buckley and Oliver are both contemporary exponents of a Hegelian account of motion, with Buckley’s work focusing on the

is because he is also a decidedly “Aristotelian” thinker. Hegel’s recourse to the Aristotelian notion of motion is at the same time a recovery of medieval understandings of the ways in which thinking about motion enables one to think about the whole gamut of human inquiry and to discern a living unity in those inquiries.

The structure of the *Science of Logic* thus exhibits a reparative dimension (overcoming false oppositions) and a constructive one (exhibiting the relations between pairs of terms, and investigating the motion that these relations display). Putting things this way will affect how one reads the table of contents of the *Science of Logic*. Consider two ways of reading the table of the first three chapters.

First:

Being (being, nothing, becoming), Determinate Being (determinate being as such, finitude, infinity), Being-for-self (being-for-self as such, the one and the many, repulsion and attraction).

Second:

Being (opposition of being and nothing; unity of being and nothing), Determinate Being (quality and negation, something and other, finite and infinite), Being-for-self (determinate being and being-for-self, one and many, repulsion and attraction).

The first way is a list of topics. The second way is an enumeration of the different pairs of terms that Hegel treats in each topic. It is possible to read the *Science of Logic* in such a way that one’s primary questions concern what Hegel says about “being,” or how Hegel criticizes Kant’s use of the table of categories, and so forth. It is likewise possible to read accounts of Patristic theology in order to answer one’s primary questions about what doctrinal views the Church came to affirm. But it is also possible to read them – the *Science of Logic* and Patristic theology alike – in such a way that one’s primary questions concern how errant logics are identified and repaired through alternative handlings of pairs of terms which had previously been falsely opposed.

Take for example Hegel’s famous claim about the relation of being and nothing:

Pure being and pure nothing are therefore the same. The truth is neither being nor nothing, but rather that being has passed over into nothing and nothing into being – “has passed over,” not passes over.⁸

classical “scientific” tradition, and Oliver’s focusing on the medieval “theological” tradition. In both cases it is apparent that a concern with motion requires a generative undermining of the false oppositions between “science” and “theology” in the modern period – a false opposition that Hegel too sets about overcoming.

⁸ Hegel, *The Science of Logic* (di Giovanni), pp. 59–60; *Science of Logic* (Miller), pp. 82–83.

This is one of those puzzling claims that provokes the better students to launch various inquiries into what Hegel is up to, but which also furnishes less able students with all the reasons they need not to bother with Hegel, who is obviously (on the evidence of these two sentences) insane, or at least unintelligible.

The reason that it is a puzzling claim is that these two sentences do not constitute the claim Hegel wishes to make. They are the first half of that claim. Here it is in full:

Pure being and pure nothing are therefore the same. The truth is neither being nor nothing, but rather that being has passed over into nothing and nothing into being – “has passed over,” not passes over. But the truth is just as much that they are not without distinction; it is rather that *they are not the same*, that they are absolutely distinct yet equally unseparated and inseparable, and that *each immediately vanishes in its opposite*. Their truth is therefore this *movement* of the immediate vanishing of the one into the other: *becoming*, a movement in which the two are distinguished, but by a distinction which has just as immediately dissolved itself.⁹

Quoting just the first part is deeply misleading, because in isolation it looks as though Hegel is doing the exact opposite of what he is obviously – it is obvious when the entire claim is taken as a whole – trying to achieve. The “Chalcedonian” quality of Hegel’s thinking (discussed at the start of the previous chapter) is completely invisible if one takes the famous claim about “being into nothing” and “nothing into being” by itself. It is only when the whole claim is rehearsed that one sees the quality of the errant logic (a false opposition between being and nothing) and the repair (a logic in which being and nothing are “absolutely distinct” *and* “unseparated and inseparable”). “Being” and “nothing” are a pair. When one grasps this pair, one starts to deal in a third term: “becoming.”

In other words, “reading Hegel’s claims” can give a somewhat misleading impression of the shape of the argument, if one breaks up the sentences into short utterances and then treats them in isolation. To do justice to Hegel’s thinking one has to identify the pairs of terms he is discussing, *and do justice to them as pairs*. Hegel’s point in the opening of the *Science of Logic* is not that “being passes over into nothing” per se but that the terms “being” and “nothing” are a pair of terms, in relation to each other, and one cannot make sense of the one without understanding its relation to the other. When one achieves this, one has the next term, becoming, and can proceed to make sense of that. And in any case, Hegel explicitly denies that “being passes over into nothing,” as one can see plainly in the text. The use of

⁹ Hegel, *The Science of Logic* (di Giovanni), pp. 59–60; *Science of Logic* (Miller), pp. 82–83.

the perfect tense, and the denial of the present continuous, is intended to convey that the relation between the two terms is already operative when one encounters either one. In Hegel's terms, investigating this pair of terms reveals a "movement" (in this context it is in thinking): grasping the relation between being and nothing, a relation which is already operative when one encounters either term, leads thought to "move" to the next term becoming.

"Thought" is an agent in Hegel's text. "Thinking" does various things. This is an unfamiliar idiom for contemporary readers. We are more likely to speak in terms of a thinking person (when there is action to be described) and in terms of the shape of that thinking (when there is structure to be described). When Hegel says "thought," the reader should interpret this as "the way people think": this will avoid unfortunate misunderstandings, including the problematic impression that Hegel is writing about some living entity called "thought." Thought is alive, for Hegel, but that is because of the life of the people who think in various ways, which in turn is part of the life of nature and spirit (also a pair, for Hegel).

The next task is to do justice to that final sentence: "Their truth is, therefore, this *movement* of the immediate vanishing of the one into the other: *becoming*, a movement in which the two are distinguished, but by a distinction which has just as immediately resolved itself." Being and nothing are not only related as a pair. They are related as a display of "motion." Hegel draws on a rich Aristotelian (and subsequently medieval) history of reflection on motion precisely as the way in which humans participate in God.¹⁰ There is thus an intrinsically theological dimension to the very structure of Hegel's logic, when he speaks of motion, and speaks of it in ways that unify various kinds of inquiry (including the logical) and in ways that display the participation of human action as spirit. We shall be interested in whether this results in an unwelcome collapse of the distinction between divine and human action.

Hegel's *Science of Logic* starts with pairs (being-nothing, something-other, finite-infinite) and then proceeds to map more and more complex cases, so as to generate the entire categorical structure of human thinking. By the time Hegel gets to discussion of "the judgment" in the second volume, things are highly complex. There are at that juncture four terms in relation to each other (judgments of existence, of reflection, of necessity, of the notion) and each of these four terms includes within it three terms in relation to each other (in the case of the judgment of reflection, these are the singular, the particular, and the universal judgment). By this stage of the argument we are long way from the innocent world of mere pairs, and are in a spectacular jungle of mutual implication and relation. The structure of the second volume, *The Doctrine of the Concept*, is itself a huge and imposing edifice displaying this kind of triadic structure. The first section is on

¹⁰ This is superbly argued in Oliver, *Philosophy, God and Motion*, pp. 119–137.

“subjectivity” (100 pages or so). The second section is on “objectivity” (50 pages or so). And the third section (keyword: *third*) is on “The idea” (75 pages or so) – in which subjectivity and objectivity are shown to be: *a pair*. Within the structure of this gigantic pair there are all sorts of subsistent relations, including those of the judgments just mentioned – and many others.

This, then, is the shape of the *Science of Logic*. It is a logic that seeks to display the relations exhibited in pairs (or more-than-pairs), and which describes the process of thinking which grasps pairs *as pairs* as one that displays “movement” from concept to concept. The final chapter, on “The Absolute Idea” is the culmination of the whole thing. And it is this culmination that is probably most interesting for theologians.

God

Hegel tells his reader right at the start of the *Science of Logic* that

logic is to be understood as the system of pure reason, as the realm of pure thought. *This realm is truth unveiled, truth as it is in and for itself*. It can therefore be said that this content is *the exposition of God as he is in his eternal essence before the creation of nature and of a finite spirit*.¹¹

Towards the end of the Introduction, Hegel returns to this figure:

Therefore, if in the expression of the absolute, or the eternal, or God (and *God* would have the perfectly undisputed right that the beginning be made with him), if in the intuition or the thought of them, *there is more* than there is in pure being, then this *more* should first *emerge* in a knowledge which is discursive and not figurative; as rich as what is implicitly contained in knowledge may be, the determination that *first* emerges in it is something simple, for it is only in the immediate that no advance is yet made from one thing to another. Consequently, whatever in the richer representations of the absolute or God might be said or implied over and above being, all this is at the beginning only an empty word and only being; this simple determination which has no further meaning besides, this empty something, is as such, therefore, the beginning of philosophy.¹²

What are we to make of this? Two things can be said at the outset. First, that Hegel should be taken at his word: he means what he says when he speaks about God. This is not to be dismissed as mere embellishment. Second, we have a legitimate expectation that when we arrive at “the absolute idea” in

¹¹ Hegel, *The Science of Logic* (di Giovanni), p. 29; *Science of Logic* (Miller), p. 50.

¹² Hegel, *The Science of Logic* (di Giovanni), p. 55; *Science of Logic* (Miller), p. 78.

the final chapter, we will have arrived at these “richer forms” advertised in the Introduction.

An account of the first paragraph about “the exposition of God as he is in his eternal essence” is needed first of all. It should be said straight away that Hegel is not suddenly deciding to take up theology in the *Science of Logic*. He is not making any first-order claims about God. Hegel is not peering into the mind of God, or claiming to have a God’s-eye view of God’s Trinitarian life *ad intra*. His claims in the *Science of Logic* are about logic, and that means they are about human discourse about what Hegel here calls “the realm of truth.” *This speech about God is intended to reveal something about human thought, rather than about God.* The clue as to what it reveals lies in the crucial predicate that is applied to this “realm of thought,” namely the predicate “pure,” and the predicates that are applied to the “realm of truth” that this thought is oriented to, namely, “without veil,” “in its own absolute nature.”

There are two realms here: the realm of thought and the realm of truth. Whenever one has two things in Hegel’s thinking, it is generally wise to ask two questions. First, how do others think they are related to each other, according to Hegel? Second, how does Hegel think they are related to each other? The relation of the realm of thought to the realm of truth is rather obviously one of the fundamentally anxious questions of modern philosophy since Descartes. As we saw in the *Phenomenology*, Hegel treats how others see this relation, and offers his own contrasting account. Others see the relation as one of opposition: the realm of thinking is opposed to the realm of truth (as in skepticism); others still see the relation as one of identity: the realm of thinking is the realm of truth, and it is set over and against the realm of things in the world (Descartes’ distinction between *res cogitans* and *res extensa*, which is not only a distinction but an opposition, a split). Where the two realms are opposed to one another, philosophy faces the impossible (in Hegel’s view) task of relating them to one another. Hegel’s goal is to preserve the distinction, but to insist that they are a unity – what I call a “pair.” Hegel’s thinking is manifestly Trinitarian here. To say that the “three” are “one” is to say that they are distinct but in relation, and one cannot properly speak of one without speaking simultaneously of its relations to the other two. “Unity” is not quite the right word for this, as such a word threatens always to abolish the different terms that in relation, and produce only one term. It is for this reason, perhaps, that the Christian tradition invented its own term, “triunity,” and why I have applied this lesson in the analysis of Hegel here, in speaking of “pairs.” If one speaks of “triunity” (in the case of three terms in relation) or “pairs” (in the case of two), there is no danger of producing either excessive division or excessive homogeneity. Given that our ordinary everyday logics tend to parse everything through division or homogeneity, thinking triadically (for both triunity and pairs are, alike, triadic logical forms) is a strenuous and

rather counter-cultural mental discipline. Hegel's point is that only such strenuous discipline will be satisfactory if one is to investigate logic.

In other words, the realm of thought and the realm of truth are not two things utterly separated (as for skeptics) nor are they two things utterly identified (as for Descartes) nor yet are they one thing with multiple attributes (as for Spinoza). Of the two seventeenth-century thinkers, Spinoza has the better approach, from Hegel's point of view, because at least his account of the one substance grasps the unity of thinking and being. But Hegel is not forced to choose between these two accounts. In the wake of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, to think of objects is also to think of the conditions of such thinking. The conditions for the thinking of objects require the coming together of objective and subjective terms. From Hegel's point of view Kant is mistaken to think that the objective can be apportioned to sensible intuition, and that the subjective can be apportioned to categories and concepts (understood too narrowly by Kant as rules for judgment). Kant is right to want to "combine" the objective and the subjective in the transcendental analytic. But his error lies in being guided by a logic in which the objective and the subjective are falsely opposed to one another, and so the "combination" Kant achieves preserves and deepens an excessive division. Hegel's cure – which he presents in the *Science of Logic* – is for thought to be guided by a logic in which the objective and the subjective are indeed distinct, but also inseparably in relation. In this logic "the concept" is not one side of this relation, as it is for Kant: to do justice to the objective is to describe its relation to the subjective, and vice versa. The concept, for Hegel, is a way of speaking about the pair subject/object, rather than one side of the relation.

This is the context in which Hegel writes of the "realm of pure thought" as if it itself is "*the realm of truth as it is without veil*." It is easy to misunderstand Hegel, and to think that he means that the realm of truth is identical to the realm of thought (worse: pure thought) without remainder. That is a poor reading, which reduces Hegel's thought to precisely the one-sidedness that he is so concerned to overcome, and which cannot distinguish Hegel from Descartes in some ways. Hegel means that when one considers logic at its most unqualified, one considers the unity of thinking and truth that expresses their complete mutual relatedness.

The further elaboration of this realm, in which thinking and being are distinct but in a relation of unity, as "the exposition of God as he is in his eternal essence," sounds implausibly exuberant to twenty-first-century ears. It is, however, not so far removed from the idioms of previous generations. Hegel is best interpreted, I think, as rehearsing the idea that God is the one in whom we have our thinking and our being. Most talk of God in the Christian tradition, as in the Nicene Creed for example, says much more than this: it concerns God as creator, as the one who appears in Jesus Christ, as the one who gives life to the community – to the Church. This is God "for us," and is the basis of the doctrines which quite properly guide speech

about God. Hegel is not talking in this way, at this point. He is not talking of God in a doctrinal mode at all. He is picturing (without pictures!) God as the structure of the logic of reality itself. In more Johannine language, this is the pre-existent logos, the reason in which all reality participates, considered independently of (or, if one is willing to sustain the paradox, as Hegel is, “before”) that participation. The invocation of the divine is to be taken seriously, but not doctrinally. The claim is this: the way logic works is not merely a matter of historical contingencies. Logic has the structure that it has because of historical developments, to be sure. But these developments are not haphazard. Like Aristotle, Hegel affirms that logic tends to correspond to how things most deeply are. This does not happen automatically. Logic – the pattern of human reasonings – is *shaped* by constant participation in the real, and is not just the expression of how people happen to think. Put differently, in the long run there is a positive relation between the truth expressed in human reasonings and the reality those reasonings seek to express. While there can never be any direct intuition of such reality (because human reasoning is discursive, not intuitive – it is human rather than angelic), in the long run poor reasonings will tend to fail, and good reasonings will tend to succeed. Hegel is entitled to claim that he had indeed considered the long run of reasoning in the *Phenomenology*, and it is on this basis that he presents here, in the introduction to the *Science of Logic*, what one might call the fruits of “the long view of the truth of logic.” Talk of “the exposition of God as he is in his eternal essence” sounds like a claim rooted in intuition rather than discursive reasoning. But if one takes it as harvesting the fruits of a prior analysis of long-term developments in human reasoning (which is what the *Phenomenology* is), it can be interpreted rather as confidence that, in the long run, human discursive reasoning is isomorphic with the divine reality in which it participates. The corollary of this is that in the short term, or in the case of any specific instance of human reasoning, there is absolutely no cause for such confidence. Neither intuition nor the long view can be load-bearing for any particular claim we might wish to make in the short term.

The second paragraph, which comes at the end of the Introduction, is of a rather different kind, and makes a slightly different point. If talk about “the exposition of God as he is in his eternal essence” is the fruit of a view of philosophy *in the long run*, then talk about “the expression of the absolute, or eternal, or God” is something that must be handled very carefully indeed if it shows up *at the start of the investigation*. Hegel means something like this: it is right and proper to acknowledge that if the logical investigation begins with pure being, it is in a sense beginning with God. Hegel is rather vague why this should be. We might say that if God is the one in whom all being has its source, then to begin with pure being is in a sense to begin with God. But there is a trap for the unwary. Talk

about God in the Christian tradition is not *only* talk about pure being. Talk about God is, quite properly, freighted with all kinds of other images and narratives. What is quite proper in theology, however, has no place whatsoever in an investigation into logic. Hegel implies that one must make the strongest distinction between *logical* talk about God *qua* pure being, and *theological* talk about God *qua* Trinity. Talk of God as “simple” is suitably formal for a study of logic, although from the point of view of theology it must seem rather “empty,” to use Hegel’s word. In other words, it is crucial to understand the difference between a logical investigation like the *Science of Logic*, and theological investigations like the Church’s teaching about the Trinity, even when words like “God” show up in both kinds of investigation. This is a useful lesson, as it has the effect of preparing the reader of the *Science of Logic* to expect an investigation into logic, and not to expect to find theology, *even and especially where Hegel talks about God*.

We are now in a position to know what to expect in the discussion of “the absolute idea,” namely a discussion of logic, and not an investigation into theology. Where the word “God” shows up, we have (on the basis of the Introduction, at least) two tropes already in play: the first is that of the isomorphism between logic and reality, which one can expect to see if one takes the long view; the second is that of the simplicity of God, as a traditional and respectable way of thinking of pure being. There may be other nuances to the meaning of “God” in the final chapter of *The Science of Logic*, but whatever they turn out to be, we should first expect them to be expressions in logical inquiry rather than theology. We turn now to the text of the final chapter.

The Absolute Idea

The absolute idea, as it has shown itself, is the identity of the theoretical and the practical where each for itself is still one-sided and has the idea in itself only as a sought-for beyond and an unattained goal; each, therefore, is a *synthesis of striving*; each has, but equally does *not* have, the idea in it; each passes from one to the other without bringing both thoughts together; each remains locked in their contradiction.

Die absolute Idee, wie sie sich ergeben hat, ist die Identität der theoretischen und der praktischen, welche jede für sich noch einseitig, die Idee selbst nur als ein gesuchtes Jenseits und unerreichtes Ziel in sich hat – jede daher eine *Synthese des Strebens* ist, die Idee sowohl in sich hat als auch *nicht* hat, von einem zum anderen übergeht, aber beide Gedanken nicht zusammenbringt, sondern in deren Widerspruch stehenbleibt. (WdL 2:283)

We are introduced immediately in this final chapter to a “pair,” where two terms are distinct from each other but irreducibly in relation. In this case the two terms are “the theoretical” and “the practical,” which are the products of the previous discussion. The previous discussion investigated the idea of the true, and then the idea of the good. This discussion is a repair of the logic which guided Kant’s attempt to separate theoretical from practical reason: it is a demonstration that they should be taken together. Kant’s errant logic has two notable features. First it is marked by an emphatic one-sidedness, and displays the tendency to produce false oppositions; Hegel points out that Kant just ignores the longer historical traditions which display alternative logics which do not produce such false oppositions. The false opposition Hegel names here is that between the “I” and the “object.” The errant logic that guides Kant’s inquiry displays a one-sided concern with the “I” at the expense of the “object” which is relegated to an unknowable “thing in itself,” Hegel says.¹³ Second it is marked by a refusal to take truth seriously. This is an errant logic in which only “phenomena” and “mere representations given in everyday life” count as knowledge. The deep question, which was always part of the long tradition, is: does the subject possess the truth “in and for itself?”. The errant logic which guides Kant’s inquiries does not merely fail to tackle this question: it is structured in such a way that the question does not even show up as valid. The whole realm of truth (to use Hegel’s words) is one that Kant considers a matter of “overshooting” (*etwas Überfliegendes*) what is cognitively permissible (*WdL 2:233*).

The errant logic that guides Kant’s inquiries is not wholly errant: it rightly replaces the angelic intuition of the God’s-eye view with the human discursivity of fallible judgments. Its error lies in the production of a false opposition between subject and object, and (having produced this opposition) its one-sided concern with the subject. The God’s-eye view is rightly abandoned, but the logic by which this is achieved also abandons the whole realm of truth. This is because the only meaning that “truth” can have for Hegel is one in which there is a distinction in inseparable relation between the subjective and the objective. The errant logic of Kant’s inquiries removes the God’s-eye view by removing the objective and then routing all questions of knowledge through the subjective. The repair will lie in articulating a logic in which the distinction in irreducible relation between subjective and objective is properly handled.

¹³ The most comprehensive defense of Kant’s logic against this Hegelian attack is that of Henry Allison in *Kant’s Transcendental Idealism: An Interpretation and Defense* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004). I shall merely report Hegel’s views here, and not attempt to evaluate the extent to which they are fair representations of, or persuasive criticisms of, Kant.

Hegel diagnoses a variety of errant logics which guide what he calls “the idea of the true.” The prime example of an errant logic is the extension of Euclidean geometry beyond its original limited sphere of operation so that it now guides *all* inquiries into “the idea of the true.” This is the *more geometrico* of Cartesian and Spinozist philosophy. The problem with this is that the scope of truth is disastrously narrowed to the handling of deductive relations between axioms and hypotheses, rather than genuinely open-ended inquiries into truth. In geometry everything turns on what is “given” in definitions or in axioms: geometry itself is unable to specify how what is “given” relates to what is “true.” The power and promise of geometrical proofs lies in the sophisticated technologies it offers for handling deduction. But it has nothing at all to say about the crucial prior stage, when an object is “given” to inquiry. The only things “given” in geometry are definitions and axioms. As John Burbidge points out, although Hegel does not, this criticism applies just as much to natural science, with its method of constructing and testing hypotheses.¹⁴ Natural science is an astonishingly powerful set of technologies for handling sets of data which are produced and classified by the practices of natural science. The problem is of the same kind as Hegel diagnosed in the geometrical: natural science knows what to do with its data, but has nothing to say about the relation of its data to the object that is given to inquiry. The only things “given” in natural science are data, and there is no account given “within” natural science of how the beautifully constructed “system” (the experiments, the hypotheses, the reports) actually relates to what Hegel calls “the truth.” For a scientist or community of scientists, to talk of “truth” is to talk from within the system. Science generates truth, and indeed generates its own objects of inquiry: but who is to say whether these relate to what counts as truth? Just as geometry can get to work only after it has produced definitions and axioms (a production which is not itself part of the work of geometry, but which mysteriously precedes it), so natural science can get to work only after it has produced data or objects (a production which, again, is not itself part of the work of natural science, but which again mysteriously precedes it). Such “mysteries” vanish if one treats these precedents as historical transmissions rather than self-evident truths.

Hegel’s point is not that there can be no inquiries into objects. It is that genuine inquiry will not take the form of geometrical proofs (or, following Burbidge, natural science). Geometry and natural science mistakenly take themselves to be concerned only with “objects,” and thus offer no account of the distinct but irreducible relation between objects and subjects. In fact they are concerned almost exclusively with what one might call “the productions

¹⁴ Burbidge, *Logic of Hegel’s Logic*, p. 102.

of subjectivity” – whole networks of relations that are determined by the discipline itself. Kant was right to formalize this in the Preface to the second edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason* as the requirement that “objects must conform to our knowledge.” The problem is that the logic which guides such inquiry, and which Kant formalizes so elegantly, is errant. It produces a false opposition between subject and object, and then spins its web of signification from only one side: the subjective. If this sounds rather abstruse, one might say that natural science is like a crashing bore. A crashing bore is a man who knows what he thinks, and is pleased to tell you what he thinks. You can introduce whatever phenomena you like into the conversation. The crashing bore will have a view. It is pretty certain that the phenomena do not do much work in the production of that view. You can introduce cases, exhibits, conundrums, the weird and the wonderful: the crashing bore will force them into his pre-existing worldview, butchering them if that is what it takes, and will then tell you what he thinks. Natural science can whip up a hypothesis to explain things. But the kind of hypothesis it can whip up is limited to what it can imagine, and the production of imagination is not a properly scientific endeavor. The problem is not that natural science is too focused on objects, because it turns out that – like the crashing bore – it actually produces the objects it describes, even if it takes itself to be receiving them. The problem is that it has no account of the relation between subject and object, and thus no account of the “thinking” (Hegel’s word) that characterizes that relation. A genuine inquiry into inquiry itself has to be a simultaneous inquiry into objects and into our thinking of objects. Any inquiry that deals only in objects, and not in thinking, has nothing to say about inquiry, and thus cannot concern “truth.”

The “idea of truth” thus eludes geometry (and natural science) and the frustrated inquirer produces, in the next step in Hegel’s narrative, a new model for inquiry: “the idea of the good.” This has as its explicit focus the subjectivity of the subject – the projects it has and the goals it sets for itself. The subjectivity that ruined the “idea of truth” is now made into a virtue for the “idea of the good.” But this inquiry too is guided by an errant logic – the same errant logic as before, in fact: one that falsely opposes subject and object. The failure of the “idea of the good” (whose details are found in a section prior to the one we are considering) leads to a recognition of the one-sidedness of the relation between subject and object, and this recognition leads to the turn to a logic which acknowledges the intimate relation between subject and object, namely the logic of the absolute idea.

We have managed to interpret the first line and a bit of our first quotation. The absolute idea is the product of thought’s motion from a one-sided false opposition of theoretical (truth) and practical (good) investigations. The theoretical concern with the objectivity of truth, and the practical concern

with the subjectivity of our projects, are taken together in a unity. The “sought-for beyond and unattainable goal” that Hegel mentions here is the successful isomorphism of our thinking with reality. In a more familiar idiom: it is the correspondence of thinking with truth. Theoretical projects and practical projects each display themselves, when separated from one another, as a synthesis of striving, by which Hegel means that they are persistent in their search for truth, and in the long run this persistence will pay off (although the errant forms of reasoning in play mean that the goal appears “unattainable”).

“Each has, but equally does *not* have, the idea in it.” This is one of those Hegelian turns of phrase that tends to alienate common-sense interpreters. Hegel loves this way of speaking, and relishes the paradoxes that it produces. It is a disaster for the reader if this is interpreted as a gnomic utterance of profound depth that only the initiated can understand. The reader who fancies that he has grasped these Hegelian mysteries is in danger of becoming mysterious (and even authoritarian) in turn, and might be tempted to practice the sign of the macrocosmos in the mirror each morning, as a warm-up prior to doing Hegelian philosophy. But Hegel is not encouraging his reader to become pretentious and to take on the airs of one who is mysteriously deep. He is thinking and speaking in a recognizably Aristotelian idiom. The way in which each side “has” is different from the way each side “does not have” the idea in it. It has it, in so far as the unity of the theoretical and practical is implied by each side’s orientation to truth. It does not have it, in so far as it fails to recognize this unity, and places obstructions in the way of this recognition. The theoretical is bound up with the practical, but does not know that it is bound up in this way; and vice versa. It has, and does not have, this unity. This is expressed as motion: thought passes from the theoretical to the practical (Kant writes the *Critique of Pure Reason* and then some months later writes the *Critique of Practical Reason*, to take the obvious example), but fails to offer an account of how they are related. There is a “contradiction” (*Widerspruch*) between them, which persists and remains unresolved.

The absolute idea, as the rational concept that in its reality associates only with itself is, in terms of this immediacy of its objective identity, on the one hand the return to *life*; but it has just as much sublated this form of its immediacy, and has within itself the most emphatic opposition.

Die absolute Idee als der vernünftige Begriff, der in seiner Realität nur mit sich selbst zusammengeht, ist um dieser Unmittelbarkeit seiner objektiven Identität willen einerseits die Rückkehr zum *Leben*; aber sie hat diese Form ihrer Unmittelbarkeit ebensosehr aufgehoben und den höchsten Gegensatz in sich.
(WdL 2:283–284)

This sentence contains within it the whole panoply of idiosyncratic Hegelian terms: *Idee*, *Begriff*, *Realität*, *Unmittelbarkeit*, *Identität*, *Leben*, *Aufhebung*, *Gegensatz*. This is not by chance: Hegel is now summing up where the adventure of the *Science of Logic* is arriving at. It begins by qualifying the absolute idea as “the rational concept that in its reality associates only with itself.” This echoes the claim about God that we noticed in the Introduction to the *Science of Logic*. We might gloss “absolute” as “not qualified in any way whatsoever” to capture this. For the idea to be “absolute” is for it to function in the way it does without being determined by its context. Wherever it shows up in inquiry, it will express the same complete unity of subjective and objective terms. The “immediacy of its objective identity” is associated with “life,” in the first instance. Errant logics may tend falsely to oppose the “objective identity” of the idea, in one corner, and the reality of “life” in the other. This is the familiar false opposition of thinking and being. The repair of this error means furnishing a logic in which the immediate (that is, without reference to anything else) objectivity of the idea shares in, participates in, the life which this movement of thought returns to. To talk of the absolute idea is to capture in logic the movement of thought as it returns to the life which is its source and its meaning. This is not the logic displayed in empiricism, where “life” is given over and against thinking, and is available to be merely observed by it, one might say. It is an “idealist” logic, in which thinking and life are mutually entangled in the most intimate way. The final clause is the most interesting. The entanglement of thought and life is not one that finally abolishes otherness, as if the whole thing collapses into narcissistic sameness. The relation between thinking and life has its “immediacy” (its non-reference to anything else) *aufgehoben* and it has the highest *Gegensatz* within itself. Translating the verb *aufheben* and the noun *Gegensatz* is a challenge, but it is not too difficult to see what tasks they discharge here. *Something has changed*. At one moment the idea is marked by its immediacy; but in the end, this immediacy is not the last word, and that which is opposed to it – the object – is contained within it. Translators of Hegel are no longer free, since the late nineteenth century, to translate *aufheben* as they see fit. The translation “to sublimate” is now standard, and any departure from this causes confusion and damaging uncertainty. But it is worth English readers having words like “cancel,” “abolish,” “preserve,” and – perhaps best of all – “suspend” to hand, when reading “sublate.” Similarly *Gegensatz* probably has to be “opposition,” although again one needs to bear in mind that *Satz* is the word used in German for “proposition,” and that *Gegensatz* is also the word for “antithesis” or “contrast” or “contrary.” In this paragraph, the object is not merely the opposition but the *highest* opposition. We might do justice to this “highest” by saying that the opposition is maximally recognized, while being intimately part of (*in*

sich) the idea. The idea is what it is because the other, the object, is genuinely distinct from it and irreducibly part of it.

The concept is not only *soul*, but is free subjective concept that is for itself and therefore has *personality* – the practical, determined in and for itself, objective concept which as person is impenetrable atomic subjectivity – but which, nevertheless, is not exclusive singularity, but is for itself *universality* and *cognition*, and in its other has *its own* objectivity as an object.

Der Begriff ist nicht nur *Seele*, sondern freier, subjektiver Begriff, der für sich ist und daher die *Persönlichkeit* hat – der praktische, an und für sich bestimmte, objektive Begriff, der als Person undurchdringliche, atome Subjectivität ist, der aber ebenso sehr nicht ausschließende Einzelheit, sondern für sich *Allgemeinheit* und *Erkennen* ist und in seinem Anderen *seine eigene* Objectivität zum Gegenstand hat. (WdL 2:284)

The reference to “soul” and “atoms” is taken over from the prior chapter, in which Hegel describes the logical function of (ultimately Aristotelian) soul-talk in philosophy. It refers primarily to a way of individuating spirit, and picturing the individual spirit (one for each person) as a thing like other things, and moreover a thing that is self-contained like an atom (WdL 2:234–235). The logic displayed in the later set of claims is one in which the false opposition between singularity and universality is overcome. It is a form of thinking in which doing justice to the singularity of persons is not in conflict with doing justice to each individual’s participation in common life, in reality more widely. It is also a logic in which the activity of the individual-participating-more-widely can be characterized as knowledge (*Erkennen*). This is a familiar critique of Kant, whose one-sided logic permits one to know only phenomena, and one is not permitted to talk of “knowledge” when one is talking of the whole in which the one participates. Hegel insists by contrast that it is appropriate to speak of knowledge in this context, but makes it clear that to know in this way is not like knowing phenomena. To know in relation to the whole is not to add another item, “the whole,” to the list of other items that one might know. It is a changed relation of knowing: “in its other it has its own objectivity for an object.” There are two terms functioning as a pair here: “other” and “itself.” Thinking knows the other and it knows itself; thinking holds the other before it, and it holds itself before it. But these “two” moments are a “unity,” one might say: one cannot do justice to the other without doing justice to its relation to the self; and one cannot do justice to the self without doing justice to its relation

to the other. The distinction between “other” and “self” is not abolished: it is indefinitely qualified by relation, all the way down. Such a relation is what love really is: the utter non-competitiveness of other and self, and the acknowledgment that each is constituted by its relation to the other. I discover that I am who I am because of my relation to you.

Everything else is error, confusion,
opinion, striving, willfulness and
transience; the absolute idea alone
is *being*, non-transient *life*,
self-knowing truth, and is *all truth*.

Alles Übrige ist Irrtum, Trübheit,
Meinung, Streben, Willkür und
Vergänglichkeit; die absolute Idee
allein ist *Sein*, unvergängliches
Leben, *sich wissende Wahrheit* und
ist *alle Wahrheit*. (WdL 2:284)

Theologians are perhaps at a modest advantage over some philosophers when confronting passages of this kind. Hegel’s language is overwhelmingly Johannine here, and the logic of the absolute idea is the logic displayed in John’s Gospel. (Hegel opens the second volume of the *Science of Logic* with a short but trenchant discussion of the meaning of Pilate’s question “*What is truth?*” in John 18:38, in which he suggests that modern philosophers have given up on truth, just as Pilate did. The Johannine concerns of the *Science of Logic* are thus quite explicit, right from the start of this volume.) More than this, Hegel alternates between Aristotelian metaphysical and Johannine evangelical terms: *Sein* (metaphysical), *Leben* (Johannine), *sichwissende Wahrheit* (logical), *alle Wahrheit* (Johannine again). In other words the fruits of Aristotelian metaphysics, re-authored in Hegel’s own logic, are shown to be the fruit of the gift of the spirit in John’s Gospel. Notice the kinds of resonance that “being,” “non-transient life,” and “all truth” display. These emphatically do not refer to empirical data like chalk and cheese. We are no longer in the realm of the merely empirical, but have to do with the whole sphere of truth in which everything participates. It is reminiscent of the realm of Plato’s forms, but whereas Plato’s account in *Phaedo* and *Republic* tends to oppose the world of forms to the world of perceptibles, in Hegel’s account these worlds fully participate in one another. It is reminiscent of Spinoza’s account where the one substance includes all thinking and all being, but whereas in *Ethics* this relation is rather mechanistic, in Hegel’s account it is an organic, living circle of life. There is constant living exchange between heaven and earth in the *Science of Logic*.

Having laid out the fundamentally Johannine structure of the logic that governs speech about the absolute idea, Hegel goes on to summarize the

relation of philosophy to all other modes of inquiry. His goal is to show that philosophy makes explicit the logic that guides these other inquiries.

It [sc. the absolute idea] is the sole object and content of philosophy. Since it contains *all determination* within it, and its essence is to return to itself through its self-determination and particularization, it has different shapes, and the business of philosophy is to recognize it in them. Nature and spirit are in general different modes of presenting *its existence*, art and religion its different modes of apprehending itself and giving an adequate existence to itself. Philosophy has the same content and the same goal as art and religion; but it is the highest mode of apprehending the absolute idea, because its mode is the highest, namely the concept. Hence it embraces in itself those shapes of real and ideal finitude as well as of infinitude and holiness, and comprehends both them and itself.

Sie ist der einzige Gegenstand und Inhalt der Philosophie. Indem sie *alle Bestimmtheit* in sich enthält und ihr Wesen dies ist, durch ihre Selbstbestimmung oder Besonderung zu sich zurückzukehren, so hat sie verschiedene Gestaltungen, und das Geschäft der Philosophie ist, sie in diesen zu erkennen. Die Natur und der Geist sind überhaupt unterschiedene Weisen, ihr Dasein darzustellen, Kunst und Religion ihre verschiedenen Weisen, sich zu erfassen und ein sich angemessenes Dasein zu geben; die Philosophie hat mit Kunst und Religion denselben Inhalt und denselben Zweck, aber sie ist die höchste Weise, die absolute Idee zu erfassen, weil ihre Weise die höchste, der Begriff ist. Sie faßt daher jene Gestaltungen der reellen und ideellen Endlichkeit sowie der Unendlichkeit und Heiligkeit in sich und begreift sie und sich selbst. (WdL 2:284)

This is a passage that causes trouble for those interpreters who wish to deny that Hegel does metaphysics in the *Science of Logic*. It seems clear here that the absolute idea is not just a way of talking about shapes of human thinking. Nature and spirit are, Hegel says, different modes of presenting its existence. Hegel's system of classification, like any other, poses sets of alternatives which are then made available for judgment. He inherits a system of classification in which such alternatives include subject/object, thinking/being, self/other, individual/community, finite/infinite, and many others, and his project entails taking up these alternatives into an novel

system of classification with new alternatives: representation/concept, religion/absolute knowing, phenomenology/logic, nature/spirit. Here, in this final chapter of the *Science of Logic*, we see what kind of logic governs the relations between such alternatives. Nature and spirit are not simply alternatives that are opposed to each other, as they are in a dualistic mind/body system of classification. They are “modes” (or “ways,” *Weisen*). Following Christian Wolff’s lexicon for rendering Latin terms in German, the normal German translation for Spinoza’s “modus” in the fifth definition of the *Ethics* is “modus,” but Hegel read in Latin, and in conscious reaction to Wolff’s scholasticism he generally preferred to find German words for Latin terms, and here he chooses *Weisen*. Talk of modes signifies a particular way of orienting a system of classification: modes indicate a field of difference that is subordinated to a higher field of unity. Modes qualify substance, in Spinoza; that is, one substance can be conceived in different ways. If, for Hegel, nature and spirit are “modes,” they are themselves a field of difference that is subordinated to a higher field of unity, which here is named “existence” (*Dasein*). We might say today that the physical and social worlds are different ways in which the structure of reality is disclosed, and we cannot do justice to either unless we relate each to the other. Art and religion are not just ways of apprehending that structure of reality – this would be to render those who practice them mere spectators. Art and religion are, he says, modes of apprehending itself. This is a reflexive relation: *the absolute idea apprehends itself in the modes of art and religion*. In the *Science of Logic*, reality thinks. The language of agency here is striking, and typical of Hegel. The absolute idea *apprehends itself* and it *gives an adequate existence to itself* in art and religion.

This is a very unfamiliar idiom for us, and to mitigate that unfamiliarity we can offer a somewhat oblique recasting of it. Modern philosophy tended, for no good reason, to locate mind in the brain. It also tended to assume, for no good reason, that thinking goes on in one’s head. This way of thinking is sharply at odds with the prior tradition, which tended to attribute rationality to reality, rather than limit it to the individual thinker. If one puts to that older tradition the question, “where is mind located?”, one gets interesting answers. The world of truth, for Plato, is spatially underdetermined: indeed it is radically underdetermined. If one asks, “where is the realm of forms?”, Plato offers no direct answer. He does, however, make it clear that it is not to be found in “this” world, and it is certainly not located in our heads. Plato just is not dominated by flattened space in the way that the post-Newtonian European mind came to be, and where Plato does use spatial imagery, it is suggestive and allusive. The world of categories and concepts is, for Aristotle, spatially underdetermined too. If one asks, “where is order located?”, Aristotle seems to think it is located in the world, and the task of metaphysics is to discern it. In the classical Greek tradition, then, mind is

in the world (and also, curiously, not in it). The modern mind is decidedly shrunken in comparison. When two people are talking, or a group of people are solving a problem together, where is “mind” located? When one reads a book, even, where is the generativity of thinking located?

Hegel’s *Science of Logic* is in strong continuity with these earlier traditions, and self-consciously so. Hegel often reminds his readers that the problems of modern philosophy are often products of errant logics that are absent in earlier periods. If we hear Hegel claim that “order shows itself in art and religion” this is not best interpreted as merely poetic language about the ordering capacities of artists and religious folk. Even if one grants for a moment that one might do this, it is nevertheless striking that this order does not show up in the brains of such people, so much as in the things they produce. Mind is in painting and in prayer. The agency of artists and religious folk is thus not only “their” agency. And the origin of their products is not only their private imaginations. Mind is in the world: art and religion are modes of that mind’s self-expression. Put differently: the artifacts of art and religion are not best thought of as the external expressions of an order that is an attribute of states of inner mind, for Hegel. This is admittedly how we modern folk have been taught to think. We have ideas and we give voice to them. For Hegel this is a sign that an errant logic is operative: the sign of this errant logic is that a false opposition between “reality” and “thinking” has been produced. Hegel takes a more Aristotelian view: mind is in the world; he also takes a more Spinozist view: our expressions of thinking (through art and religion, for example) are “modes” of this mind. What painting and prayer make external are the *already external* shapes of mind. Should any reader be tempted to say, “well, yes, I suppose Hegel means that there are forms of social life that certain activities make explicit,” he has already placed a big obstacle in the way of such a view: “nature and spirit are different modes of presenting its existence.” It is not just “spirit” (i.e. forms of social life) that display mind; it is also displayed by “nature.”

The difference between Hegel and the prior traditions on which he draws is that Hegel insists on the discursivity of human apprehension of this “mind” or this “order” in the world. We do not have immediate access to it. For Hegel, everything is mediated: we grasp one thing “in” another, whether this be language, the community, persons, or whatever. We do not intuit reality. Rather, our thinking produces the absolute idea, to use Hegel’s terms. The fit between what *we* produce and the reality that produces us, as it were, is not something that is guaranteed in advance. Quite the opposite: the *Phenomenology of Spirit* is the story of failures of fit. But even the most defective productions, guided by the most errant logics, are expressions of the absolute idea, for Hegel. Some are more adequate than others.

What, then, is philosophy in relation to all this? If nature and spirit present (*darstellen*) the absolute idea, and if art and religion are modes of

the absolute idea's self-apprehension, what is philosophy? The concept is to philosophy what painting and prayer are to art and religion. Philosophy embraces (*faßt*). What it embraces is presented here in a highly compact formulation: real and ideal finitude, infinitude and holiness.

The reference to "real" and "ideal" finitude refers back, it seems, to the beginning of the third section of volume 2, on "the idea," rather than to the section in volume 1 on "finitude."¹⁵ The section in volume 2 is devoted to exploring the meaning of "idea" which turns out to be the expression of the unity of the pair "concept" and "reality" (*Begriff* and *Realität*). The discussion of finitude here concerns what Heidegger will re-author as "being towards death," namely the significance of finitude as its being marked for death as soon as it is born. One can consider finitude as something which qualifies things independently of a consideration of their concept, or one can consider finitude in a way that takes full account of the concept. This produces what Hegel here calls "real" and "ideal" forms of finitude. In the absolute idea, both are embraced.

With respect to what comes next, theologians may once again perhaps enjoy a small advantage. It is not surprising to the general reader to find the pair "real" and "ideal" embraced in philosophy. Nor is it surprising to find the pair "finitude" and "infinitude" embraced in it. But it is surely a big surprise to find infinitude and holiness (*Heiligkeit*) embraced. Theologians, however, may not find this so shocking, because of the earlier references to "eternal life" and to "all truth," which prepared the way for this. All the same, one still has to ask what is meant by this reference to holiness. How can this reference to holiness possibly function as a clarification of "philosophy"? Surely Hegel would have been better off saying that *theology* is the discipline that embraces these lofty heights. That would at least have the virtue of confirming for philosophers that this is not a text they need to take seriously.

Hegel is not engaged in theology here. The extent to which one is shocked by the intrusion of holiness into a discussion of philosophy's embrace of various pairs is a measure of how far some modern philosophy has strayed from the long tradition out of which it emerges. We take it for granted these days that philosophy is a quite separate endeavor from theology: they have different faculties with very limited communication between them. There are some philosophers who do "philosophy of religion," and there are some theologians who taken an interest in logic. There are philosophers who go to church or keep *Shabbat*, and there are theologians who do not. This truce in the conflict of the faculties is a strange and rather recent development. As soon as one does any rudimentary historical study

¹⁵ It refers, if this is so, to *WdL* 2:173ff.

of philosophy, one discovers that just about every major philosopher who commands our respect was interested in God. They may or may not have led lives of prayer, but they wrote about God in the essays they have bequeathed us. Nor were they interested only in proofs for the existence of God: their interest primarily was in knowledge of God (which might include proofs of various kinds along the way). Like Hegel, they were only in an attenuated sense doing theology in this work: their focus was philosophy. That is to say, they were making contributions to ontology, logic, metaphysics, what we now call philosophy of language, ethics, and so forth. And an interest in questions about knowledge of God played a greater or lesser role in these inquiries. Hegel's invocation of the pairs "real" and "ideal" finitude, and "infinitude" and "holiness" are reminders of this long tradition. One can of course ask, "well, what does Hegel mean by holiness?", and that is a fair question. Unfortunately Hegel does not answer it. We can presume that he meant by holiness what his contemporaries and his forebears meant by it, and if philosophers today have forgotten how to use that word, there is no cure but for them to become historians and learn a little theology.

We can begin to clarify it. It is worth noticing which pairs Hegel singles out for philosophy's embrace, and appreciating that they form part of Hegel's own system of classification. They are "nature" and "spirit," "art" and "religion," "real" and "ideal" finitude, "infinitude" and "holiness." As a matter of textual interpretation, it seems rather clear that these are meant to be the highest things Hegel can imagine that philosophy might embrace. They occupy the higher levels of his system of classification. And from the perspective of contemporary philosophy, they seem rather alarming. We can translate these terms into a more familiar contemporary idiom. Philosophy's highest vocation is the thinking it does in relation to the natural sciences and the humanities, to aesthetics and religion, and to logic and metaphysics. If this is true, then one should expect to find the following sub-disciplines in philosophy: philosophy of science, of humanities, of aesthetics, of religion, of logic, and of metaphysics. The one that is obviously missing in contemporary philosophy is not philosophy of religion at all, but philosophy of humanities. This is not a familiar sub-discipline to us these days, and even the term sounds artificial and out of place. Hegel wrote a philosophy of history and a philosophy of right, both of which would come under this heading. The philosophy of humanities would include philosophical investigations into such topics as archaeology, criminology, economics, education, geography, history, law, literature, politics, psychology, social anthropology, and sociology. It is clear from the arrangement of the contemporary university that if there are any such philosophical investigations they are dispersed around the various faculties. Philosophical investigations into literature are far more likely to be housed in departments of German or French

than they are in departments of philosophy, and those that investigate history are likely to be in departments of history. It appears that the “mind” of philosophy (like mind in general) is dispersed, to a degree. What one finds in departments of philosophy varies considerably from university to university. All this is to say that Hegel’s brief articulation of the vocation of philosophy immediately generates a jumble of questions about how the modern university is structured, and the place of philosophy in it. Indeed, it generates big questions about what the humanities are, and whose job it is to think about the humanities. Hegel thinks it is the job of the philosopher, but that would probably come as news (and perhaps not entirely welcome news) to today’s philosophers. To engage this short passage from the *Science of Logic* is to engage these questions, and we must be content with scratching no more than the surface of the surface here.

The main point is that it is not theology, even though the absolute idea “comprehends” infinitude and holiness. Let us gloss holiness as “whatever comes at the top of one’s classificatory hierarchy.” Anselm named God, in his *Proslogion*, as “that than which nothing greater can be conceived.” Anselm is thus admirably explicit about his own age’s classificatory hierarchy, and what is to be found at its apex. It is perceived as a rather odd pursuit to ask contemporary economists, politicians, and literary critics what is to be found at the apex of their classificatory hierarchies, and one will perhaps hear answers that are more Platonic than Thomist: the good, the true, the beautiful, as well as terms that derive from social anthropology, such as the sacred. It is not “theological” to place holiness in the discussion, at any rate. It belongs to all disciplines to concern themselves with holiness, in the sense that I have offered here, and which is the sense which in my view Hegel shares.¹⁶

The derivation and cognition of these particular modes is now the further business of the particular philosophical sciences. The *logical* dimension of the absolute idea can also be called a *mode* of the same;

Die Ableitung und Erkenntnis dieser Besonderen Weisen ist nun das fernere Geschäft der besonderen philosophischen Wissenschaften. Das *Logische* der absoluten Idee kann auch eine *Weise* der selben

¹⁶ Those who consult the Marxist (free) version of the *Science of Logic* online will be rather puzzled by my discussion of holiness, because the editors of that website simply edit it out: “Hence it embraces those shapes of real and ideal finitude as well as of infinitude and cognition of these particular modes is now the further business of the particular philosophical sciences.” Vandalism. http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/hegel/works/hl/hlabsolu.htm#HL3_824. Last accessed 17 Aug. 2012.

but as *mode* signifies a *particular kind*, a *determinateness* of form, the logical aspect, by contrast, is the universal mode in which all particular modes are sublated and enveloped. The logical idea is itself in its pure essence, enclosed in simple identity in its concept and it has not yet occurred in the *reflective surface* of a determinateness of form.

genannt werden; aber indem die Weise eine *besondere* Art, eine *Bestimmtheit* der Form bezeichnet, so ist das Logische dagegen die allgemeine Weise, in der alle besonderen aufgehoben und eingehüllt sind. Die logische Idee ist sie selbst in ihrem reinen Wesen, wie sie in einfacher Identität in ihrem Begriff eingeschlossen und in das *Scheinen* in einer Formbestimmtheit noch nicht eingetreten ist.
(WdL 2:236–237)

Hegel's principal contrast here is between investigations into phenomena and the categories which guide them and investigations into logic. (I leave to one side discussion of the challenges of translating *Schein*, as it appears only in passing here. It is a complex technical term with its own section at the start of book 2, volume 1.¹⁷ It is part of Hegel's attempt to overcome Kant's false opposition between *scheinen* and *erscheinen*. In Hegel's hands it more strongly evokes something of a reflective surface in which something other than the object can be seen.) An investigation into logic is not just another kind of investigation alongside other investigations. It is a second-order investigation: it is if you like an investigation into investigation. This is what Hegel means by "universal mode," and this is what guides his language of sublation and enveloping. The term "logical idea" appears for the first time here: it is generated by this discussion of the absolute idea rather than referring back to earlier in the *Science of Logic*. It seems to be a way of talking about the absolute idea, rather than being distinct from it. Hegel's language about the logical idea is reminiscent once again of the language about God in the introduction to the *Science of Logic*: it is "pure essence" without reference to any particular things. Again we can gloss this as having a scope that is utterly without qualification. It is for this reason that logic displayed in the absolute idea (this is how I interpret "logical idea") means that the absolute idea cannot be just another item in a list of things: it displays the fundamental logic that guides such things as lists. The surprising feature

¹⁷ G.W.F. Hegel, *Wissenschaft der Logik: Die Lehre vom Wesen* (ed Hans-Jürgen Gawoll, Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1999), pp. 7–24 (pp. 244–257 in vol. 11 of the Academy edition); Hegel, *The Science of Logic* (di Giovanni), pp. 341–353 (where it is translated "shine"; *Science of Logic* (Miller), pp. 394–408 (where it is very unsatisfactorily translated "illusory being").

of the absolute idea, in Hegel's account, is the insight that it is not only infinite in scope: *it is also generative*:

Hence logic displays the self-movement of the absolute idea only as the original *word*, which is an *expression*, but one that has again immediately disappeared as something external; the idea is thus only in this self-determination of *hearing itself*; it is in *pure thought*, in which difference is not yet *otherness*, but is and remains utterly transparent to itself.

Die Logik stellt daher die Selbstbewegung der absoluten Idee nur als das ursprüngliche *Wort* dar, das ein *Äußerung* ist, aber eine solche, die als Äußeres unmittelbar wieder verschwunden ist, indem sie ist; die Idee ist also nur in dieser Selbstbestimmung, *sich zu vernehmen*; sie ist in dem reinen *Gedanken*, worin der Unterschied noch kein *Anderssein*, sondern sich vollkommen durchsichtig ist und bleibt. (WdL 2:237)

Hegel here invokes the trope of motion that characterizes so much of his logical investigation and analysis of forms of thinking in the *Phenomenology* and the *Science of Logic*. This is profoundly unfamiliar language in late modern philosophy, although there are clear signs of it in Spinoza's account of *conatus*, and Leibniz' emphasis on "life." Hegel draws on these, but it has almost a more musical nuance to it in his philosophy: ideas in Hegel's philosophy are generative, just as musical germs are generative in Beethoven's sonatas. Hegel here refracts a long tradition of reflection on motion, from Plato and Aristotle onwards, as indicated earlier in this chapter. Motion is a trope that, for Hegel, gathers multiple investigations together at the same time as it describes the generativity of thinking (as opposed to claiming that it merely reports or represents). *The idea performs*. It is worth noting that logic is not itself the motion: logic displays the motion that belongs to the absolute idea.

The Johannine language that guides Hegel's description is unmistakable. The absolute idea is "the original word." The opening of John's Gospel (which itself rehearses the opening of Genesis) is invoked to find language for that which has not yet been uttered: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (John 1:1, KJV). Hegel's language is that of "attending to itself," and the insistence on "difference" in a way that does not yet have sufficient "objectivity" or "determination" to be "otherness": this strongly echoes the not yet spoken word of John 1.

Can it be maintained in the face of this overwhelming evidence that Hegel is not doing theology? Unquestionably. The reason for this is found in the

first words: “logic displays.” A theological investigation would be a first-order matter, in which the meaning of the word’s being, its companionship, its identity with God, might be explored, and rendered in terms that bring it to life for the reader. Hegel has his eye firmly on the second-order matter of articulating the logic that is displayed in this evangelical claim. The logic is the one with which we have been dealing. It is a logic whose fundamental structure has unqualified scope, which itself encompasses all other investigations in itself, and which makes the underlying structure of them and itself fully explicit. It thus has no content of its own, but is what structures any content whatsoever. It structures this not in *either* being *or* thinking, but in the distinction-in-unity that characterizes the pair “being” and “thinking,” to which at this level of analysis one cannot do justice without describing the relation of each to the other. All false oppositions are overcome, and a logic of utter unqualified connection and mutual implication generates all inquiry, because the same logic generates all reality. The language of “transparency” (*durchsichtig*) contrasts with that of the reflective surface (*Schein*). Does Hegel perhaps mean that one cannot look “at” this agency, in which the “ex” has disappeared from “expression?” Does he mean that if we try to visualize the absolute idea we will find ourselves visualizing something else – the “content” or the “determinations” which are enfolded in it? If so, one can perhaps see why Hegel would invoke the logic of Christian talk about God at this point. Anyone who has ever tried to think God always finds that they are thinking something else, for that is how language works, as Aquinas famously summarizes it in *ST* 1a 13.1: “we can give a name to anything in as far as we can understand it” (*quod aliquid a nobis intellectu cognosci potest, sic a nobis potest nominari*). Perhaps God is “utterly transparent” to our understanding (*intellectus*), to combine Hegel and Aquinas on this point. And this transparency is not that of clarity but of having to “look through” and see something else.

The logical idea therefore has itself as the *infinite form* for its content: the *form* which constitutes the opposite to *content* in so far as this [content] is the determination of form that has gone into itself and has been sublated in the identity, such that this concrete identity stands opposed to it [sc. identity] generated as form; it [sc. content] has the shape of an other and a *given* as against the form which as such

Die logische Idee hat somit sich als die *unendliche Form* zu ihrem Inhalt: die *Form*, welche insofern den Gegensatz zum *Inhalt* ausmacht, als dieser die in sich gegangene und in der Identität aufgehobene Formbestimmung so ist, daß diese konkrete Identität gegenüber der als Form entwickelten steht; er hat die Gestalt eines Anderen und Gegebenen gegen die Form, die als solche schlechthin in *Beziehung* steht

stands simply in *relation*, and whose determinateness is at the same time posited as reflective surface. More properly, the absolute idea itself has for its content only this, that the determination of form is its own completed totality, the pure concept.

und deren Bestimmtheit zugleich als Schein gesetzt ist. – Die absolute Idee selbst hat näher nur dies zu ihrem Inhalt, daß die Formbestimmung ihre eigene vollendete Totalität, der reine Begriff ist. (*WdL* 2:237)

The absolute idea, considered in terms of the logic that it displays, is not exactly contentless, but its content is of a peculiar kind: it is “infinite form.” Hegel seems to be attempting to get at what is meant by “form” as such, without specifying whether it is this or that particular form. When we talk about “form” what do we mean? In connection with the absolute idea, we mean that which is left when we subtract determination. A thought’s content is of a particular kind. Something gave rise to that content. The name we give to this “something,” which precedes the determination of content, is “infinite form.” When form gives rise to content, this content does not exhaust what form is: there is an excess of form over the content to which it gives rise – this is how I interpret “its determinateness is . . . mere appearance [*Schein*].” In other words (better words, Hegel suggests), the “content” of the absolute idea is “pure concept.” We should more properly talk in this way because the absolute idea is a way of talking about “that which determines” *before* the determination happens. “Concept,” as usual, designates how, in Hegel’s logic, one describes the crystallized process of thinking the object, in a way that atemporalizes or de-tenses that process and makes it available as a tool to guide thinking – a tool which is itself the product of a logic which overcomes the false opposition between being and thinking. By speaking of “pure” concept, one is thinking of what is left when one subtracts determination. To talk about the concept is normally to talk about how the process of thinking about particular objects becomes crystallized. To talk about the “pure” concept is to adopt the same approach, but in a way that thinks at the level of “any object whatsoever”: no particular object is in view.

The particular clauses are difficult. But the general thrust is not: Hegel is offering a description – drawing on a variety of metaphors – of the shape, the generativity, the essence of thinking *before* any particular thought is in view. This “before” is not a temporal before, but a logical before. This is crucial. Hegel is not saying that there is some “absolute idea” whose content is “pure concept” that is somehow just waiting to become determinate. I have no idea what this could possibly mean, in any case. Hegel is working backwards from determinate thoughts, and removing particularity element by element, and then trying to describe what is left. I am reminded of those extraordinary scientists who produce materials so thin that they are only a few atoms high. I have only the dimmest idea how this is achieved, but they

often speak in terms of stripping layers of atoms away in order to produce maximally thin (and thus maximally cold) materials. This is, I understand, very difficult and very expensive to do. The “absolute idea” may be a bit like this: the product of patient and time-consuming abstraction or subtraction. If determinate thought about things is “warm,” then the absolute idea is the coldest thinking one can imagine.

The *determinateness* of the idea and the whole course of this determinateness has constituted the object of the logical science, from whose course the absolute idea itself has itself emerged *for itself*; however, it has shown itself “for itself” in the following way: that determinateness does not have the shape of a *content*, but simply as *form*; that the idea is accordingly the unqualified *universal idea*. Consequently what still remains to be considered here is thus not a content as such, but the universal of its form – that is the *method*.

Die *Bestimmtheit* der Idee und der ganz Verlauf dieser Bestimmtheit hat den Gegenstand der logischen Wissenschaft ausgemacht, aus welchem Verlauf die absolute Idee selbst *für sich* hervorgegangen ist; für sich aber hat sie sich als dies gezeigt, daß die Bestimmtheit nicht die Gestalt eines *Inhaltes* hat, sondern schlechthin als Form, daß die Idee hiernach als die schlechthin *allgemeine Idee* ist. Was also hier noch zu betrachten kommt, ist somit nicht ein Inhalt als solcher, sondern das Allgemeine seiner Form – das ist, die *Methode*. (WdL 2:237)

Hegel thus makes it quite clear that the absolute idea is a way of thinking about the logic which guides thinking, and that this way of thinking is the product of a whole “course” of investigations into determinateness. The term “for itself” is a technical term for Hegel which captures the way in which something implicit (*an sich*) is made explicit (*für sich*), or – in different words – the way in which something considered independently of its relations is considered in a way that takes account of how it relates to itself (or to anything or anyone else). The absolute idea does not make “content” explicit, nor are its relations (to itself or to anything else) specifiable as any determinate content. It is just form, with no further qualification. The idea is not any particular idea (in a Kantian or even a Platonic sense), but any idea whatsoever, or “universal idea.” The remainder of the investigation will thus not be into content but – in a strange phrase – “the universal of its form.” By this Hegel means form “as such” or “any form whatsoever.” The word to describe this is “method,” by which Hegel means “what it is that the science of logic does.”

We should take stock. It has been relatively slow going up to this point: the commentary I have offered thus far covers about two (not particularly long) pages of “the absolute idea.” This kind of reading is essential to get a

sense of what is required to make sense of Hegel's text, but also to offer the right kind of encouragement to the curious theological reader who wants to understand the *Science of Logic*. Most discussions of "Hegel" float above the text, and many can be shown not to be defensible when tested against the details of the text.¹⁸ Many discussions of the *Science of Logic* display the opposite problem for theologically minded readers: they are minutely detailed, stay perhaps unhelpfully close to Hegel's language, and threaten to strand the reader on the spider's web of secondary material. The only respectable way to proceed is to read the text, and to try to explain it; I have tried to render it in ways that draw attention to the theological nuances, and to do so in ordinary English as far as possible. The first couple of pages are where the main dramatis personae for the chapter are introduced, and the main logic (which guides the rest of the discussion) laid out. If one is not secure in one's reading of the first couple of pages of "the absolute idea" the rest is a bit of a fog.

I do not propose to continue at the same level of detail. Not only is it tiring to read, it is also unnecessary for our purposes. The attentive reader will be able to go to the text and make some pretty educated guesses about what Hegel is up to in any particular passage. There are entire books about this chapter of the text, although none to my knowledge in English, and of course any commentary on the whole text treats its content.¹⁹ Instead, the remainder of Hegel's final chapter will be summarized and – more importantly – the shape and underlying logic of his discussion will be described. I shall, to use Hegel's terms, be investigating his own logic, as he investigates logic.

The structure of this chapter is to introduce gradually more and more terms, in relation to those which precede them, in a cumulative narrative, rather like a juggler handling more and more balls.

The next pair of terms, described in relation to each other, is concept (*Begriff*) and method (*Methode*). By method Hegel means, characteristically, to designate the overcoming of a false opposition. Here it is between two kinds of modality (*Modalität*): "a modality of being [*Sein*]" determined in and for itself" and "a modality of cognition" (*Modalität des Erkennens*).

¹⁸ I have not attempted to mention, let alone catalogue, the many indefensible things said about the *Science of Logic* by commentators past and present, not least because I have not read them carefully enough to offer a charitable interpretation of how they are arrived at. For a discussion (and taxonomy) of misapprehensions, see Houlgate, *The Opening of Hegel's Logic*, pp. 1–162.

¹⁹ Eisuke Kawamura, *Hegels Ontologie der absoluten Idee* (Hamburg: Fundament, 1973); Ludovicus de Vos, *Hegels Wissenschaft der Logik: Die absolute Idee. Einleitung und Kommentar* (Bonn: Bouvier, 1983). See also Errol Harris, *An Interpretation of the Logic of Hegel* (London: University Presses of America, 1983), pp. 287–306, and, more recently, Clark Butler, *Hegel's Logic: Between Dialectic and History* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1996), pp. 273–276, and John Burbidge's excellent short discussion of the absolute idea: Burbidge, *Hegel's Systematic Contingency*, pp. 99–105.

Method, more informally, refers to the activity of investigation, in this case the investigation that the *Science of Logic* is. The pair “being” and “cognition” is a version of the familiar Hegelian pair “being” and “thinking.” The content of thinking is not merely “given” to the method as “a merely external form.” Rather, “the absolute form has proved to be the absolute foundation and final truth.” Method (i.e. the *Science of Logic*) does merely get to work on content that is given to it. It investigates “absolute form,” which is to say, the structuring and generation of objects utterly without qualification. It deals not in this or that, but in what produces this or that and renders it thinkable. In other words, in contrast to investigations into phenomena (“content”) we are dealing with an investigation simultaneously into phenomena and categories, with a primary focus on categories (“form” describes this primary focus). We are not working within a system of classification so much as accounting for how systems of classification work: it is second-order work.

The method has emerged as the *concept which knows itself*, and which *has* itself as the absolute, both subjective and objective, as its *object*, and hence as the pure correspondence of concept and its reality as an existence that it [sc. concept] itself is.

Die Methode ist daraus als *der sich selbst wissende*, sich als das Absolute, sowohl Subjektive als Objektive, zum *Gegenstand habende Begriff*, somit als das reine Entsprechen des Begriffs und seiner Realität, als eine Existenz, die er selbst ist, hervorgegangen.
(WdL 2:237)

The potential false opposition between “method” and “concept” is ruled out here. The course of the *Science of Logic* itself (the method) is, we now discover, the concept. It does not know this or that: it knows itself. This “itself” is not narcissistic navel-gazing. The “itself” can only be described adequately if one does justice to both subjective and objective aspects, and to the way in which concept and reality (a version of thinking and being) are not opposed to each other, but are distinct but in relation.

In other words, the *Science of Logic* is not best thought of as a report on something other than itself. It is a reflexive account: it describes itself, with all the qualifications of what is included in “itself” just mentioned. This claim is very easy to misunderstand. Because of Hegel’s emphatically reflexive forms (signaled by the omnipresence of *sich*), it can appear that the subject is just contemplating itself. The stray word here is “just.” The use of reflexive verbs in Hegel is an ambitious topic in its own right. But whatever else one says about them, the presence of reflexive verbs normally signals the overcoming of a false opposition between subject and object. In fact, it is rather rare to find Hegel describing a subject as oriented in

a one-sided fashion towards itself, without also finding a sharp criticism of this orientation precisely as one-sided. Hegel is unusual in attributing the turn to the subject in modern philosophy as a one-sided affair, which with false modesty claims not to be able to know objects. This is Hegel's critique of the "thing in itself." Interestingly, Hegel does not always think that this turn to the subject was a reaction against the one-sided concern with the "object" in pre-modern thought. His classic example of a form of thinking that does justice to the utter mutual implication of subject and object is not his own philosophy, but that of Anselm, specifically Anselm's ontological argument which, he says, displays an intimate relation between thinking and being, although this relation remains implicit in the tradition until he (Hegel) draws out its implications (VPR 3:9–12, 114–119, 271–273).

The method is not just a report of itself; it is the motion (*Bewegung*) of the concept. The reference to motion is bound up, for Hegel here, with the relation which method has to objects. Hegel makes some provocative claims about the concept. He says that objects cannot offer resistance (*Widerstand*); they cannot avoid being penetrated or saturated (*durchdrungen*) by it; they are completely subdued (*unterworfen*) by it. This sounds like very bad news for objects. And so it would be if concepts routinely bludgeoned objects into submission, if that is what concepts do in Hegel's hands. It seems to be this way when shortly after this Hegel adds to the abusive mix the term "highest force" (*Kraft*), which is immediately upgraded to "absolute force." It is capped with a description of "its highest and sole *drive* to find and cognize itself through itself in everything." This is not just exuberant language: it has not just accidentally strayed but confidently stridden into the realm of violation and domination.

Hegel has been very roundly and influentially criticized for his account of conceptuality, most famously by Adorno in *Negative Dialectics*. His two most quotable criticisms are not of this particular passage, but of a section on "the particular concept" earlier on:

There is only one way for Hegelian logic to succinctly identify a universal and an undefined particular, to equate cognition with the fact that the two poles are mediated; and that is for logic – which Hegel also views as an a priori doctrine of general structures – not to deal with the particular as a particular [*das Besondere*] at all. His logic deals only with particularity [*die Besonderheit*], which is already conceptual.²⁰

²⁰ Theodor Adorno, *Negative Dialektik* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1966), p. 320; Theodor Adorno, *Negative Dialectics* (tr. E. Ashton, London: Continuum, 1973), p. 328.

This echoes an earlier criticism in the same book where Adorno uses his criticism of Hegel to expose problems in Heidegger's account of being: "Theory [in Hegel], instead of bringing the indissoluble into its own in concepts, swallows it by subsumption under its general concept, that of indissolubility."²¹ It also develops a claim made in an earlier collection of essays: The "unity of the system [in Hegel] stems from unreconcilable violence."²²

It is thus important to get Hegel right. How one interprets the passage from "The Absolute Idea" depends on which terms carry the rhetorical load. If it is the verbs, then this is the language of rape, and one has to register with alarm the evident thrill that Hegel's text displays. If it is the nouns (method, concept, idea), then things are not quite so straightforward, because the verbs will be qualified by what we already know about these nouns. I want to make the case that it has to be the nouns, even though Hegel presents a soft target for hard criticism with his verbs. The case is not complicated: the whole point of words like "concept" and "idea" is that they display logics which do not express the familiar and problematic false oppositions between being and thinking, subject and object, thought and reality. Violation and domination do not display these logics: violation is violation because it asserts the subjectivity of the one over and against, and at the expense of, the other. The concept simply never does this in the *Science of Logic*. Hegel uses the language of love, of life, of truth – Johannine language, in fact – to describe this distinctness in relation. I think this is sufficient to temper one's alarm, or at least to provoke the charitable reader to consider more than one possible interpretation. All the same, those verbs are hardly innocuous, and their choice – and the thrill Hegel shows – performs no merely attentive mutuality. It's visceral action, and the language of subduing does not merely point but actively yanks in the opposite direction to mutuality. The most charitable reading one can offer is that Hegel's vision of mutuality, at this point, is one of dominant and submissive roles, and that it is not clear whether Hegel's thrill derives from the one or the other. If it is the thrill of being subdued, then the Christian reader can probably travel at least some of the distance with Hegel, as there is precedent in the tradition (including in scripture) for celebrating God's might and human submission, and the "might" that is celebrated is heavily qualified as an expression of supremely self-giving love which is at no point in competition with the one who is loved. This kind of speech is always in danger of sliding into what we now, after the nineteenth century, name sadism and masochism. But again the long tradition tends not to shrink from putting language in danger when it speaks of God's being and action. Why Hegel should do so at this point is

²¹ Adorno, *Negative Dialektik*, p. 124; *Negative Dialectics*, p. 120.

²² Theodor Adorno, *Drei Studien zu Hegel* (Frankfurt: Surhkamp, 1963), p. 39.

baffling, unless he intends some connection with that long tradition. If, on the other hand, it is the thrill of domination, then we have an adumbration of tendencies that will become more explicit and celebrated in Nietzsche's late philosophy and some vigorous opposition is required, along with compelling alternative ways of thinking.

The relation of method and concept produces a subordinate distinction between "investigative cognition" (*das suchende Erkennen*) and "true cognition" (*das wahrhafte Erkennen*). This seems to be a distinction between inquiries into phenomena (where the phenomena are treated as over and against the subject), and inquiries into categories (where phenomena are treated as determined by subjectivity, and subjectivity is responsive to the reality of phenomena). This is perhaps the relation between natural science and philosophy, and this is the usual way of taking Hegel here. Philosophy does what natural science does not, namely, account for the relation between subject and object, because natural science only accounts for the object. In this discussion Hegel uses the metaphor of the syllogism. In the case of investigative cognition, the different terms of the syllogism, including the middle term, are not only distinct but separate from each other. In the case of true cognition, the concept is the middle term, and in a way that expresses the unity-in-distinction of subject and object (WdL 2:238–239).

Having clarified questions of abstraction, purity, relation to content, the motion displayed by the concept, and the relation between concept and method (including the difference between different kinds of inquiry), Hegel turns to the question of *beginnings*. This is an interesting topic to find in a final chapter. Where does logic begin? Hegel reminds the reader that when the question of beginnings was discussed at the start of the *Science of Logic*, and again at the start of the second volume, beginnings were associated with immediacy. This immediacy is not, as in Kant and others, the immediacy of sensuous intuition, but the immediacy of thinking, such as the thought of "being" which initiates the whole investigation.

Hegel now starts counting. Over the course of several pages we have (1) "first universality" (*die erste Allgemeinheit*), which is "immediate" (*eine unmittelbare*) (WdL 2:239); (2) "first negative" (*das erste Negative*), which is mediated (*Vermitteltes*) (WdL 2:244); (3) "second negative" (*das zweite Negative*), which is also the "second immediate" (*das zweite Unmittelbare*), which is also "universal" (*Allgemeine*) (WdL 2:247).²³

This is the discussion from which later, in the twentieth century, emerged the myth of the Hegelian dialectic as "thesis," "antithesis," and "synthesis."

²³ Wendte offers a meticulous analysis of "first negation," "second negation," and the resulting unity: see Martin Wendte, *Gottmenschliche Einheit bei Hegel: Eine logische und theologische Untersuchung* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2007), pp. 77–155.

This is a crass description of what Hegel is doing, but it is worth acknowledging it, as this myth still shows up in textbooks and encyclopaedia articles read by theologians. It is best treated as nonsense. A better account is readily available, as soon as one sets about making sense of the text, rather than trying to rehearse some abstract scheme.

This is an opportunity for Hegel to discuss dialectic, along with a range of other things. From a purely textual point of view, the majority of space is devoted to “first universality” and the features it displays. This merits five pages of discussion. Hegel’s language is organic and energetically vital. He speaks of the first universality as being marked (in a Spinozist way) by “drive” (*Trieb*) (WdL 2:240) and (in a Leibnizian way) by “the germ of the living” (*der Keim des Lebendigen*) (WdL 2:241). In other words, the beginning already has motion in it. And this means that “development” (*Entwicklung*) is not something added to the first universal, but is already present in it. Hegel’s language is biological here, but it is also striking to our ears how this language can just as much be used to describe the music of Beethoven whose “germs” contain within themselves the beginnings of development right from the start.

Hegel’s terms are best not defined, because definitions are static sorts of things, and Hegel’s terms are usually in motion. Rather than offering definitions, it is better to observe them in action, and see how they move and what functions they discharge. Dialectic is one of these terms. Students rightly want to know what Hegel means by dialectic. This passage from the *Science of Logic* is an excellent text to investigate with this question in mind, and the passages in question are to be found at WdL 2:242ff. Hegel begins with two observations. First, dialectic is an ancient science and to read Plato is to discover the generativity of dialectic. Second, modern metaphysics misunderstands dialectic. Misunderstandings for Hegel are often one-sidednesses. And so it proves to be here. Hegel names Kant, and attributes to the latter the view that treats dialectic “as an *art*, as though it rests on a subjective *talent* and does not belong to the objectivity of the concept.” Along with this subjectivity is a sense of dialectic’s contingency – that it might or might not produce a certain result. Hegel says, by contrast with Kant, that it is vital to recognize that dialectic is necessary to reason.

Hegel does not offer a definition of dialectic, incidentally. He assumes that the reader is familiar with ancient Greek texts and the practices found in them. Hegel thus assumes familiarity with the practice of Greek structured conversations in which one party proposes a claim, and the second party proposes a counter-claim, which elicits a responsive claim from the first party – and so on.

The older Eleatic school, Hegel reports, used this method to defeat those who argued in favor of motion. The Eleatics denied motion, and the form that their denial took was dialectical. The Socratic case is more interesting,

for Hegel. Socrates used dialectic against the Sophists, and did so in a way that called into question certain moral certainties of the time (a form of questioning that got him killed). Hegel takes seriously Socrates' desire to have to do with the truth, and yet his practice was one of dialectical reasoning, which unsettles what is taken to be the truth. The critical or destructive qualities of dialectic make it an odd vehicle for pursuing the truth. Hegel attributes to reason the power to cure the destructiveness of dialectic. In his discussion of the challenges made to moral nostrums he says we must have confidence (*Vertrauen*) that at the same time as disturbing them, it will know how to restore (*wiederherstellen*) them. This is the first sign that Hegel is not offering a merely Eleatic or Platonic account of dialectic. There is a trust in reason, in the dialectic itself, and not just an Eleatic skepticism or a Socratic disturbance. People get dialectic all wrong, Hegel says, when they see only this capacity to upset:

The basic prejudice here is that dialectic only has a negative result, something that will shortly receive a more thorough stipulation. First of all we should notice the previously cited form which it [sc. dialectic] customarily takes; according to that form, dialectic and its results concern either the object in question or else the subjective cognition, and pronounce that the subject or the object is void. By contrast, the determinations which are present in it [sc. the subjective cognition] remain unnoticed and are just taken to be valid.

Das Grundvorurteil hierbei ist, daß die Dialektik *nur ein negatives Resultat* habe, was sogleich eine nähere Bestimmung erhalten wird. Zunächst ist über die angeführte Form, in der sie zu scheinen pflegt, zu bemerken, daß sie und ihr Resultat nach derselben den *Gegenstand*, der vorgenommen wird, oder auch das subjective Erkennen betrifft und dieses oder den Gegenstand für nichtig erklärt, dagegen die *Bestimmungen*, welche an ihm als einem *Dritten* aufgezeigt werden, unbeachtet bleiben und als für sich gultig vorausgesetzt sind. (WdL 2:243)

This is the “negation” for which Hegel’s dialectics is so famous, or infamous, or at least the logical first step in his elaboration of what that negation might involve. Here, Hegel makes the preliminary ground-clearing move that warns the reader that normally people think dialectic is *only* negative: it just disturbs the ways in which people think, rather than doing anything constructive. People assume that dialectic just makes trouble, whether for the object in question or for the person trying to address an issue. What gets smuggled into dialectic, however, is the point that the dialectician is making: this is a “third thing.” (The first thing was the initial claim; the second thing

was the counterclaim. The third thing is the result: that the initial claim is called into question.) Why is this third thing not getting the same bruising dialectical treatment as the first thing?

Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* is to be applauded for exposing the problem here in the Antinomy.²⁴ One can extend Kant's insight to show that dialectic is not in fact corrosive of *either* the objectivity *or* the subjectivity in question. Dialectic is only (wrongly) thought to be merely corrosive when two things are present. First, the "third thing" gets ignored; second, the account is guided by errant logics riven by false oppositions. Hegel names "finite" and "infinite," "individual" and "universal" as examples of the latter. The *Science of Logic* has shown beyond doubt that there is an alternative logic, in which such false oppositions do not appear, and are replaced by an account in which they are pairs – distinct but in relation. This is the logic of the concept. What happens, then, if one reads dialectic in a way that is guided by *this* logic, rather than (wrongly) merely a tool for reinforcing false oppositions?

What happens is that what appears first to be immediate turns out to be mediated or related to an other. In other words, what first appears to be an independent term is shown to be one element in a pair. To take the example with which the *Science of Logic* opens, being is revealed not to be an independent stand-alone term. It is shown to be part of the pair being/nothing. One cannot do justice to being without giving an account of its relation to nothing.

The second term, in relation to which the first term has been shown, can be called "the negative of the first." It can be called the "first negative." Dialectic is genuinely negative, in opposing a "second" to the "first." That is what the Eleatics or Socrates are constantly doing. But the opposition is a relation of some kind, not an absolute (and thus false) opposition. The "negative" that is opposed to the "immediate" is in relation to it, and somehow "includes" it. I take Hegel to mean that one cannot do justice to the "second" without giving an account of its inextricable relation to the "first." Hegel experiments with some unusual formulations to capture this insight. He suggests that the first "disappears" or "perishes" (*untergehen*) in the second; "the first is contained in the second"; "the latter is the truth of the former"; "the mediated is the predicate of the immediate." As examples of this last formulation Hegel offers some paradoxical renderings: "the finite is infinite," "one is many," "the individual is the universal." Hegel's thought is sometimes taken to be mired in such paradoxes. So it is highly instructive

²⁴ Kant showed that in certain classical metaphysical puzzles, such as whether there must a first cause or there cannot be a first cause, dialectics can argue both sides, depending on where it starts. Kant diagnosed the puzzle as displaying the wrong kinds of realism and idealism, and solved the puzzles by offering a radically alternative logic, which is transcendently idealist.

that having had a go at these formulations he says quite plainly: “The inadequate form of such propositions and judgments stares one in the face” (*Die inadequate Form solcher Sätze und Urteile aber fällt vom selbst in die Augen*) (WdL 2:245). One cannot treat the second as a predicate of the first, even if such a paradoxical formulation gets at important truth. Instead, one has to recognize that the first is in a relation or relationship to the second. The negative is not just negative. It is – in another experimental formulation – “the negative of the positive, and includes the positive within itself.” It is genuinely “an other,” but it is the kind of “other” that preserves a relationship with that for which it is other.

The concept is the explicit statement of this relation of the pair of terms, as distinct but in relation, and as in motion. The “first” is only implicitly “concept,” because – as one term – it fails to account for its relation to the “second.” But one can only do justice to the “first” by giving an account of its relation to the “second.” In other words, in the “second” there is a “difference” implied – difference from the “first,” and not merely “opposition.” To do justice to the “second” is to appreciate this “difference” which is an expression of its distinctness but relation to the “first.” “Difference” is “contained” in the “second,” Hegel says. Then comes the punchline:

The dialectical moment . . . consists in positing in it the <i>difference</i> that it contains <i>in itself</i> so besteht das dialektische Moment . . . darin, daß der <i>Unterschied</i> , den es <i>an sich</i> enthält, in ihm gesetzt wird. (WdL 2:245–246)
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Where people mistakenly see only bloody-minded opposition in dialectic, Hegel sees difference, which is the expression of a relation. This relation is embraced in the concept. So the negativity expressed in the contradiction of the “first” term by the “second” is part of the “motion” of the concept. Indeed, says Hegel, it is the “turning point” (*Wendepunkt*). Hegel’s account is somewhat compressed at this precise juncture. He says that we have just arrived at a “second negative.” He does, however, go on to explain what this means. This “second negative” is a “third,” which succeeds the “first” and the “second.” What is this “third?” It is not the addition of a third term in a series, on the same level as the first two. It is the expression of the “unity” of the first two terms. Taking the “first” and the “second” as a pair produces precisely a *pair*. This unity, this pair, is the third term.

This unity contains the first two terms, in relation, within it. One can view it, however, as “immediate” even though it is the result of the sublation (*Aufhebung*) of the mediation. In other words, the “third” becomes a new

“first” term in a further potential movement of the concept. And once it functions itself as a “first” the next “second” is around the corner.

This, then, is Hegel’s fascinating experiment in recasting “difference” in a dialectical mode. Opposition is not just opposition any more: it is relation. Negation is not just negation any more: it is retentive of what it apparently negates. Hegel says of the notion:

... by its dialectical advance not only does it lose nothing, nor does it leave anything behind, but it carries along with it all it has acquired, and inwardly enriches and intensifies itself.

... verliert durch sein dialektisches Fortgehen nicht nur nichts, noch läßt es etwas dahinten, sondern trägt alles Erworbenen mit sich und bereichert und verdichtet sich in sich. (*WdL* 2:250)

The motion displayed in the concept is a circle. And, crucially (given the suspicion with which Hegel’s philosophical denouements are sometimes viewed), the “truth” of this circle is not found only at the end, in the conclusion: it is also “in the extended course of the process” (*imausgebreiteten Verlauf*) (*WdL* 2:252).

From the review of the chapter on “the absolute idea” so far it can be seen that Hegel is fashioning a description of a particular kind of investigation which deals not in phenomena but the forms of thought that that structure how we think about phenomena. The notion of “Categories,” derived from Aristotle, is a useful shorthand for these forms of thought. Most forms of inquiry, whether in the natural sciences or the humanities, are investigations into phenomena. The *Science of Logic* is an investigation simultaneously into phenomena and categories. Most forms of inquiry entail the deployment of a system of classification, where the categories in which it deals are taken for granted; they also make judgments as to how phenomena are to be located within this system of classification, and how they are to be described in the terms of the categories that belong to such a system of classification, and the rules that guide these judgments are also taken for granted. We might say that the ontology and the logic are operative in a way that passes without notice. The *Science of Logic* investigates how systems of classification work, which Hegel calls “form,” and it identifies and articulates the rules that guide judgments, which we can just call “logic.” Taken together, we have an account of a different form of inquiry, which Hegel rather simply just calls “method.” To try to describe this “method” will be a matter which does not refer to phenomena (“content”) yet will not be empty, as certain forms of logical inquiry have a tendency to be (as Hegel says at the opening of the *Science of Logic*). It will describe “itself.” This description will not operate with the same kind of system of classification

that is operative when phenomena are under investigation. To talk about how a system of classification works requires a different kind of language from talk about what kind of thing a particular object is. Hegel has some rather hard-to-understand formulations for this, as we have seen, but the shape of his thinking emerges reasonably clearly, once one grasps that he is finding terms to describe a second-order investigation. It is clear, however, that Hegel has something more encompassing in mind than what is treated in traditional logic. It is not just universals, individuals and particulars, or judgments and syllogisms. It is a matter of *any* system of classification and *any* rules which guide judgments within them. Hegel's *Science of Logic* is thus certainly "logic" as normally understood (it is not other than "logic" as some perplexed interpreters have thought); but it is also much more than that, and resembles some of the issues tackled in Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, as the references to being and to God indicate. In my view, the achievement of the chapter on "the absolute idea" is its success as one of the first attempts in the philosophical tradition to focus on the question: "what is a second-order investigation?"²⁵ Just to focus on this question is an astonishing insight; to offer a sustained account of the contours of such a "method" is a product of genius.

In the closing paragraphs of the *Science of Logic* Hegel suggests that this is a science "of the divine concept" (*Wissenschaft des göttlichen Begriffs*) and in the very last paragraph he describes the relation of the whole project to a "divine cognition" (*das göttliche Erkennen*), in relation to nature. It is not at all clear what is meant by this! To put the matter musically, it is a coda in which an inadequately prepared theme appears. He is clear, however, that such language is definitely a logical matter, and that it functions as preamble to the next series of investigations which will, next time, not be investigations into logic but into nature. And as one will by now expect, this investigation will be one in which talk of "nature" is not separable from talk of "concepts": the errant logics which produce a false opposition between "being" and "thinking" in much modern philosophy will not guide that next investigation into nature. Talk of nature will "embrace," to use Hegel's word, subject and object. Already, in advance, Hegel signals that he will not shrink from speaking of the divine when speaking of nature. But in that investigation, as in his logical one explored here, Hegel is not doing theology. Here, in the *Science of Logic*, he is doing what the title of the book advertises. Even when Hegel speaks about God, he is investigating logic.

²⁵ My account here is shaped by Collingwood's description of the difference between philosophy and the natural sciences in his magnum opus: R.G. Collingwood, *An Essay on Philosophical Method* (ed. J. Connelly and G. D'Oro, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2008). Collingwood's essay is highly influenced by Hegel and itself is shaped by an interpretation of what kind enterprise Aristotle is engaged in in *Metaphysics*.

This chapter has been somewhat technical, although it aims to be less intimidating (and less “Hegelian” in its language) than some presentations of the text, and this technicality is unavoidable given the nature of the text in question. Reading Hegel’s *Science of Logic* is demanding, and requires one to keep one’s eyes on various balls that are gradually introduced into play. But it is enormously rewarding, especially for theologians. This is not because the text is theological, but because it is logical, and because the logic on display is manifestly a logic that Hegel discerns as operative within the Christian tradition, and especially in the Gospel of John.

Hegel could well be wrong about this. But the only way to find out is to engage the text and to test its claims against the tradition’s reception of John’s Gospel.

If Hegel is right, however, then the implications for theologians and their practices of reading philosophy are profound. It will not primarily be a matter of discerning doctrinal commitments in philosophical discussions. It will not principally be a game of “spot the ontology.” It will be a matter of discerning the logics that are displayed in the tradition’s doctrinal formulations, and especially of taking stock of what happens when new logics displace older ones at the same time as strong doctrinal continuities are maintained. It is interesting to ask to what extent there is doctrinal continuity when there is logical discontinuity. This question will take up a significant portion of the next chapter, which discusses Hegel’s *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*.

God Existing as Community

Theological interest in Hegel's *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* often has as its focus Hegel's positions on a variety of doctrinal issues. There are English-language studies of Hegel's political theology, his Christology, and his account of the Trinity, for example.¹ There are also investigations into the orthodoxy of Hegel's theology when judged against the long Patristic and Western tradition.² In German the bibliography on Hegel's theology is extensive.³ And in French, there is an equally impressive level of detail on Hegel's religious thought.⁴

¹ Andrew Shanks, *Hegel's Political Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); James Yerkes, *The Christology of Hegel* (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1978); Dale Schlitt, *Hegel's Trinitarian Claim: A Critical Reflection* (Leiden: Brill, 1984).

² Cyril O'Regan, *The Heterodox Hegel* (New York: SUNY, 1994); William Desmond, *Hegel's God: A Counterfeit Double* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003).

³ Earlier studies that still attract interest include Wolfgang Albrecht, "Hegels Gottesbeweis: eine Studie zur 'Wissenschaft der Logik'" (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1958); Günter Rohrmoser, *Subjectivität und Verdinglichung: Theologie und Gesellschaft im Denken des jungen Hegel* (Gütersloh: Mohn, 1961); Jörg Splett, *Die Trinitätslehre G.W.F. Hegels* (Freiburg: Alber, 1965); Hans Küng, *Menschwerdung Gottes: eine Einführung in Hegels theologisches Denken als Prolegomena zu einer künftigen Christologie* (Freiburg: Herder, 1970); Michael Theunissen, *Hegels Lehre vom absoluten Geist als theologisch-politischer Traktat* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1970). The most thorough recent study is Martin Wendte, *Gottmenschliche Einheit bei Hegel: eine logische und theologische Untersuchung* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2007).

⁴ Roger Garaudy, *Dieu est mort: étude sur Hegel* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1962); Claude Bruaire, *Logique et religion chrétienne dans la philosophie de Hegel* (Paris: Seuil, 1964); Albert Chapelle, *Hegel et la religion* (3 vols., Paris: Éditions universitaires, 1964, 1967, 1971); Emilio Brito, *La Christologie de Hegel: Verbum Crucis* (tr. B Pottier, Paris: Beauchesne, 1982); Gaston Fessard, *Hegel, le christianisme et l'histoire* (ed. M. Sales, Paris: Presses Universitaires

The literature is enormous, multi-lingual, and exhaustive. The biggest scholarly task that remains is to remedy misapprehensions in the English-speaking world about Hegel's thought, and to undo several generations of university lectures on Hegel in which in his religious thought he is presented as a supremely and implausibly metaphysical optimist, for whom reality inevitably works out for the best, but everything is only in one's mind – a kind of delusional Leibniz. That remedy will largely involve mediating the French and German literature into English. A small part of that larger task will be attempted here.

Investigating Hegel's theology might be thought a rather eccentric pursuit, were it not so widespread, because he did not take himself to be doing theology. Hegel was certainly interested in doctrine, but did not primarily attempt – I shall argue – to study or contribute to it. He was certainly not constrained by it. Hegel was also interested in theology, although that interest served his philosophical inquiries, and he did not limit the scope of his inquiries through any accountability to the Church. Before asking about Hegel's theology, it is wise to ask about what theology is, how it relates to doctrine, and how it relates to philosophy. These are big questions, but they cannot be avoided. Before asking about Hegel's positions on a variety of doctrinal issues, it is wise to identify the questions which Hegel took himself to be answering. This is because in nearly every case those questions are not, or at least not primarily, theological.

There are interesting questions to be asked about the relation between theology and philosophy in Hegel's time, and about how this relationship is different in our own. It is difficult to think intelligently about Hegel's so-called theology without answering these questions. As I propose not to think about "Hegel's theology" I shall excuse myself from this historical task.⁵ In the introduction to this study I offered some brief remarks about how I understand the relation of philosophy to theology. I take theology to be the elaboration of a system of classification, through the interpretation of the tradition, including the interpretation of scripture. Christian theology develops a system of classification that includes such principal terms as sin, grace, nature, creation, redemption, reconciliation, eschatology, and so forth. One can refer to this as "first-order" discourse, and one of its distinctive marks is the practice of describing and classifying phenomena in a way that takes its principal terms, or "categories," for granted, and which

de France, 1990); Jean-Louis Vieillard-Baron, *Hegel: système et structures théologiques* (Paris: Cerf, 2006).

⁵ For a good introduction to the kind of theology Hegel learned while a student at the Tübingen *Stift*, and which draws attention to the ways in which theology and philosophy interacted, see Dieter Henrich, "Dominant Philosophical-Theological Problems in the Tübingen *Stift* During the Student Years of Hegel, Hölderlin, and Schelling," in *The Course of Remembrance and other essays on Hölderlin* (ed. E. Förster, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), pp. 31–54.

takes the rules that govern judgments likewise for granted. I take philosophy to be the investigation of systems of classification in such a way as to draw attention to how their categories are generated and deployed as well as to identify and articulate the rules that govern judgments made within a system of classification. One can call this “second-order” discourse, and one of its distinctive marks is the practice of investigating phenomena and categories *simultaneously*, where the categories, and the rules which guide their use, are the primary focus of inquiry. (In such a scheme “ethics” is evidently more a theological than philosophical sub-discipline.) This is a somewhat ideal way of distinguishing the two forms of inquiry: in practice most first-order discourse has moments of second-order discourse, and all second-order discourse is thoroughly bound up with particular first-order discourses. The historical practice and the modern university disciplines of Theology and Philosophy obviously do much more than what is described here, and to describe each of them adequately requires a much richer account than I have offered; the narrow purpose here is to identify the particular aspects that distinguish them from each other and to show that Theology and Philosophy cannot readily be separated in an emphatic way.

In this chapter I claim there are cases where Hegel is not best taken as making a contribution to “doctrine,” if by doctrine we mean ecclesial discourse whose purpose is to decide questions of orthodoxy and catholicity. In these cases Hegel is also not best taken as making a contribution to “theology,” if by theology we mean interpretation of the tradition (including scripture) in a contemporary idiom (to solve problems, to shape the community’s imagination, or whatever). Instead, in these cases, Hegel is doing what he generally does in his philosophy: he attempts to interpret the representational mode of religious thinking in the conceptual mode of philosophical thinking. Hegel is primarily engaged in second-order discourse. In his own terms, Hegel does logic.

Hegel’s reasons for doing this in the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* are varied. To investigate these reasons we must first settle some questions about what kind of text we are dealing with. Hegel delivered these lectures four times, in 1821, 1824, 1827, and 1831. He never published them. Hegel’s own manuscript of the 1821 lectures survived, as did lecture notes of the other series which were taken down by members of his audience. Previous generations of readers relied on the version of the lectures edited from then-available sources by Georg Lasson between 1925 and 1929. Lasson relied heavily on manuscript transcripts of Hegel’s 1827 lectures to produce a single harmonized text of the lectures. This is the version Karl Barth read, for example. The edition produced by Walter Jaeschke in 1983 and 1984 did not attempt a single harmonized text, but laid out – on the basis of the best available sources – the four different lecture series, and presented them serially. Readers can thus read the 1821 lectures, followed by

the 1824 lectures, and so on. This was the edition edited and translated into English by Peter Hodgson and his team in 1985. Jaeschke produced a new edition between 1993 and 1995, and this is the edition I have used for the commentary which follows. Jaeschke's edition presents a much richer and more varied text than is found in Lasson's harmonization, and it represents a significant advance for scholars. But Lasson had access to a treasure trove of manuscripts that did not survive the Second World War, and his edited version is all that is left of much of them, especially in relation to the 1827 lectures.

All this is to say that we do not have Hegel's *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*. Instead we have some manuscripts, and some editions based on now-lost manuscripts, and we have a carefully researched German edition that makes the best of a frustrating situation. Anyone citing Hegel's *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* is thus not citing Hegel, but citing a text that bears some relation (with luck a close one) to what Hegel delivered in Berlin all those years ago.

Returning to the question of what Hegel's aims were in his *Lectures*, we can see with some clarity that he had different aims in the different series of lectures. The 1821 lectures contradict the claim made by Kant (and radicalized by Jacobi) that God cannot be known through the exercise of reason. The 1824 lectures contradict the claim made in Schleiermacher's *Der Christliche Glaube* that "feeling" plays a decisive role in religious faith. The 1827 lectures respond to his own critics, and display his characteristic double insistence first (against rationalist colleagues) that the substance of Christian life is mediated historically and second (against historical-critical colleagues) that the truth of the Christian religion cannot be settled by historical evidence but is a matter of what he calls "the witness of the spirit." Each lecture series displays its own emphases and local concerns, and although the shape of the lectures broadly remains the same, the shape of individual sections can vary considerably.

The idea of "the witness of the spirit" nicely exemplifies a case to test the claim that Hegel is not primarily thinking doctrinally or theologically.⁶ In the 1827 lectures, in the third part on "The Consummate Religion" (by which he means Christianity) Hegel adds a new section in which he discusses the relation between the "absolute" and the "positive" in Christianity. Both terms are heavily freighted in Hegel's writing. By absolute Hegel here means a contrast with the external and the contingent. To be absolute is to proceed according to an inner logic (rather than one determined from outside)

⁶ For a contrasting more "theological" account, which discusses the ways in which Hegel's account of the witness of the spirit takes up aspects of Lutheran hermeneutics, see Philip Merklinger, *Philosophy, Theology and Hegel's Berlin Philosophy of Religion 1821–1827* (New York: SUNY, 1993), pp. 103–108.

and according to a necessary logic (rather than one which merely strings together things that happen to be true). Hegel's use of words like "necessary" (and even words like "logic") is not the same as one finds in today's analytic philosophy (whose lexicon is more tightly controlled and policed). A piece of music in which each successive moment has a sense of inevitable progression out of what precedes it is probably closer to what Hegel means by "necessary" than is the technical meaning it has in contemporary modal logic. By positive Hegel here means something given at a specific time in a specific place. When we speak of "positive law" – laws drafted and enacted by particular bodies in particular circumstances – this is the sense of the word for Hegel.

For Hegel to say that the Christian religion is absolute and positive, and that the absoluteness is in some relation to the positivity, thus sounds rather confusing, if not confused. It is typical of Hegel, however. He identifies a false opposition, and offers an account in which that false opposition does not appear. In this case, the false opposition is between the absolute and the positive, between a necessity (loosely understood) driven by its inner logic and the historical specificity of its appearance and articulation. The errant logic Hegel identifies (but does not name) is one that says, "If it is historically specific, there is no necessity. If it is necessity, there is no historical specificity." This is reminiscent of Lessing's famous dictum in his *On the Proof of the Spirit and of Power* of 1777: "contingent truths of history can never become the proof of necessary truths of reason."⁷ Hegel does not name Lessing but the latter's short and clear essay is an excellent display of the errant logic Hegel seeks to repair. Lessing develops a system of classification in which he offers a limited taxonomy of kinds of "truth." There are "truths of history," which are the kinds of thing established by historians. There are also "truths of reason," which are the kinds of thing that are proven by rational demonstration. Lessing suggests that these are quite distinct and non-overlapping kinds of thing, and a good deal of avoidable confusion is produced, he suggests, by failing to see that they are distinct. There is a (now famous) "broad ugly ditch" between them. Lessing cannot leap over it. Anyone who thinks they can help him, he wryly suggests, is welcome to try. Given that Lessing's opposition sounds rather persuasive to contemporary ears (to the extent that we too are guided to some extent by the same errant logic, as Lessing intended us to be), Hegel's attempt at repair surely remains of interest.

⁷ Lessing, *Philosophical and Theological Writings* (ed. H. Nisbet, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 85.

Hegel insists first on the positivity:

The absolute religion is first of all, though, a positive religion in this sense: everything that is for consciousness is an objective [thing] to it. Everything that comes to us has to do so in an external way. The sensible is just as much the positive. Initially there is nothing positive at all other than what we have before us in immediate intuition. Everything that is spirit comes to us like this: the spirit as such, finite spirit, historical spirit. (LPR 3:252; VPR 3:19)⁸

This is a move familiar from the *Phenomenology*. The object confronts the subject as something over and against it – here as something “external.” In the current context, however, Hegel is not concerned with the false opposition between subject and object, or between thinking and being, but with the false opposition between positive and absolute. He thus proceeds by way of an analogy with ethics, which I shall briefly rehearse.

Ethics is a realm in which we deal in education, instruction, teaching, etc. This is manifestly positive (that is, external). We also deal in laws, and these are “positive” too, in so far as they are external. But there is an equivocation in the meaning of “sensible” when we speak of sensible things like clouds or ants and sensible things like moral teachings or civil laws. Both are “external.” But a cloud or an ant is a “take it or leave it” kind of sensible thing. We may or may not register it. A moral teaching or a law is a quite different kind of sensible thing. We own it. It is part of our subjectivity and binds us. Because we own it, and because we take it as binding, it is not something purely contingent and “over and against” us. Our subjectivity is not so easily separable from its objectivity, we might say. Revealed religion exhibits an externality that is more like a law’s than an ant’s. It is suffused with externality, for sure. But the rationality we possess is bound up with the religious teachings that do not merely confront us but mark our very subjectivity.

There is a second dimension of positivity. It concerns the authentication (*Beglaubigung*, from the root *Glaube*, belief/faith) of religion. Hegel’s discussion of miracles shows that he has in mind material like Lessing’s *On the Proof of the Spirit and of Power* and Hume’s “On Miracles” from the *Enquiry* of 1751. The point at issue is the use of miracles and other testimonies to support deeper and more fundamental religious truth claims. Hume situates testimony in the context of what we already know: testimonies elicit our trust to the extent that they accord with our experience.

⁸ References to the Hodgson translation are given to aid the reader who wishes to find the relevant passage in an English edition; translations are my own unless otherwise indicated.

Lessing makes a slightly different, but related, point: reports of miracles are only reports, and we may or may not believe them. Even if we do believe them, on balance, this is not the kind of belief on which one would reasonably stake one's life.⁹ That Hegel addresses the question of miracles should elicit some curiosity.

Hegel claims without delay that miracles are "positive": the records of miracles are the records of sensible events. Hegel cements this by drawing a strong distinction between "sensible" (*das Sinnliche*) and "spiritual" (*das Geistige*). The sensible is the unspiritual. The spiritual cannot be authenticated by the sensible. The sensible belongs to the "lower," and the spiritual to the "higher": we can see that in this system of classification Hegel thus imposes a hierarchy as well as a distinction. The clinching argument, for Hegel, is scripture itself. In Exodus 7 Moses performs miracles before Pharaoh: they don't count, because even Pharaoh's magicians can do miracles. In Matthew 7, Jesus himself speaks against miracles: even those who profess to have done miracles in Jesus' name will be excluded from the kingdom of heaven if they have not done the Father's will: "by their fruits ye shall know them," and (as Hegel points out) their miracles do not count as fruits. Hegel thus dismisses those who appeal to miracles and those who attack miracles with the same gesture: they are alike "a lower sphere, which does not in the least concern us" (*LPR* 3:255; *VPR* 3:22). This is typical of Hegel: he tends not to take sides in disputes, but identifies the errant logic that governs both sides, and offers an alternative to that logic. Those who attack miracles, and those that defend them, share a logic in which miracles count, or fail to count, for something. Hegel offers an alternative logic in which miracles count, or fail to count, for not very much, and he identifies this alternative logic as a logic exemplified in scripture itself, in this case in Exodus 7 and Matthew 7.

What counts, for Hegel, is "the witness of the spirit." This sounds theological enough, and it can serve as a useful test case for my strong claim that in some cases where Hegel sounds "religious" he does not pose, nor does he answer, doctrinal or theological questions. I am confident that not only will his account of the witness of the spirit not turn out to be particularly theological, but that the discussion Hegel pursues demonstrates beyond doubt that his concerns are more narrowly philosophical, yet in a way that is not readily disentangled from theology. It remains to be seen whether a philosophy that is not readily disentangled from theology is "theology," and this question will be investigated in the course of commentary on particular passages.

⁹ Lessing, *Philosophical and Theological Writings*, p. 86.

The first thing to say is that “spirit” is not assigned to *either* God or humanity. Hegel tends to avoid this kind of dichotomy in matters of grace, as I have been arguing. He assigns it to both, in such a way that they are not opposed to one another. If one insists on assigning it in a one-sided way, then I agree with Vetö: Hegel’s discussions are overwhelmingly of human matters.¹⁰ The witness of the spirit is, Hegel says, “the true [witness]” (*Das Zeugnis des Geistes ist das wahrhafte*) (LPR 3:255; VPR 3:22). Hegel then disperses this truth across a range of phenomena. It can be felt: “our” spirit resonates or sympathizes with what is “noble, elevated, divine” in history. It can be thought: in a broadly Kantian fashion our theoretical thinking accords to categories; the maxims that guide practical reasoning serve as universal principles. “This is something secure in [thinking’s] spirit; this governs it” (*Dies ist ein Festes in seinem* [sc. *Denken*] *Geiste; dies regiert ihn dann*) (LPR 3:255; VPR 3:22). Finally it can be something that transcends resonant and categorical spirit:

The witness of the spirit in its highest way is the way of philosophy. Here the concept develops truth – pure and without qualification – out of itself without presuppositions. As it develops, it knows. In and through this development it sees into the necessity of truth. (LPR 3:256)

Das Zeugnis des Geistes in seiner höchsten Weise ist die Weise der Philosophie, daß der Begriff rein als solcher aus sich ohne Voraussetzungen die Wahrheit entwickelt und entwickelnd erkennt und in und durch diese Entwicklung die Notwendigkeit der Wahrheit einsieht. (VPR 3:23)

This is a familiar terminus in Hegel’s trains of reasoning. The highest achievement is the concept, which is here glossed in terms from the *Science of Logic*. It is not qualified by other terms: it is pure, it is presuppositionless. It develops according to its own logic, rather than according to a logic determined from outside. This development leads to grasping the necessity of the truth that emerges. As I suggested earlier, this language of development and necessity is best interpreted by an analogy with musical development and music’s “sense of inevitability,” rather than as a claim rooted in geometrical proof or modal logic. This is a striking claim, nonetheless. Basically, Hegel is saying that the *Science of Logic* can be read as the witness of the spirit, and that the witness of the spirit can be read in a number of ways, and the highest way is the way that is exemplified in the *Science of Logic*. Doctrinal and

¹⁰ Miklos Vetö, *De Kant à Schelling: Les deux voies de l’Idéalisme allemande*, vol. 2 (Grenoble: Millon, 2000), p. 209.

theological concerns can be investigated and addressed in a rich variety of ways, but the *Science of Logic* is surely not one of them, although its claims certainly have implications for how one uses philosophy in theology, as I showed in the previous chapter.

Hegel has not finished this discussion, and it is important not to end our account of it here. To do so is to give the impression, often encountered in interpretations of Hegel, that certain forms of human activity (here “resonant sympathy” and “categorical foundations”) are mere stepping stones to the final ascent to Hegel’s philosophy, and are discarded once that final ascent is complete. This is not quite true. Hegel does show a tendency to “complete” forms of thinking with philosophy, as if philosophy supersedes everything else. That tendency is present in this very passage. But he also displays a contrary tendency to preserve those other forms, and to do justice to their own integrity. That tendency is visible in what Hegel says next.

Faith and thinking have so often been opposed to one another that it is said, “one can be convinced of God and of the truths of religion in no other way than through the way of thinking.” But the witness of the spirit can be present in various different ways. It is not required that truth be produced for everyone in philosophical ways. People’s needs vary according to their formation or the free development of their spirit. It depends on one’s state of development: the standpoint of confidence, which believes on the basis of authority, is part of this variety. Even miracles have their place here, although it is certainly interesting that miracles are constrained to the minimum, that is, to the miracles narrated in the Bible. (LPR 3:256–257)

Man hat oft den Glauben dem Denken so entgegengesetzt, daß man gesagt hat: Von Gott, von den Wahrheiten der Religion kann man auf keine andere Weise überzeugt werden als auf denkende Weise. Aber das Zeugnis des Geistes kann auf mannigfache, verschiedene Weise vorhanden sein; es ist nicht zu fordern, daß bei allen Menschen die Wahrheit auf philosophischem Wege hervorgebracht werde. Die Bedürfnisse der Menschen sind nach ihrer Bildung, der freien Entwicklung ihres Geistes verschieden, und so gehört zu dieser Verschiedenheit nach dem Stande der Entwicklung auch jener Standpunkt des Vertrauens, daß auf Autorität geglaubt werde. Auch Wunder haben da ihren Platz, und es ist dann interessant, daß die Wunder auf das Minimum eingeschränkt werden, auf die Wunder, die in der Bibel erzählt sind. (VPR 3:22–23)

It is very difficult to reconcile this passage to the dominant view that for Hegel philosophy overcomes, replaces, and supersedes religion, or that the concept supersedes representation without remainder. If Hegel does not say this kind of thing, in this way, very often, he says it often enough.¹¹ This is one of the times Hegel takes this view in such an explicit fashion. It is unmistakable. The relation of faith and thinking is often posed, Hegel says, as a false opposition. This false opposition leads people to think that it is only philosophical reasoning that should lead to convictions about God. This is manifestly not the case: such convictions come about in a variety of ways, including on the basis of external authority, despite what the *Aufklärer* (the principal public figures of the German Enlightenment) may have claimed about autonomy and deciding for oneself. Different levels of education and different forms of cultural development lead to a wide variety of orientations to religious faith and the truth that it contains.

It is tempting to try to draw the lesson that everyone should receive a more thorough philosophical education, but Hegel explicitly rules this out. "The truth does not have to be developed for everybody in a philosophical way." I think Hegel is best interpreted here as saying that philosophy is a specialized set of tools, which have certain specialized uses. But those tools are not essential to the task of thinking. The task can be achieved in all sorts of ways. One gets a certain sort of result – the best, in fact – when one has the tools of philosophy at one's disposal. Philosophy can do what other tools cannot (and we have seen what that is in the discussion of the *Phenomenology*). Yet non-philosophical approaches have their own integrity, which philosophers need to take seriously and do justice to. To take them seriously is to avoid reproducing the false opposition of faith and thinking. There is no such opposition. Rather, there are different kinds of thinking, of which philosophy is one kind. Many different kinds of thinking produce faith. Hegel does not say it directly, but he implies that the faith is constant while the thinking is variable. The highest form of thinking, philosophy, does not lead to a different faith. It leads to, or proceeds from, the same faith. In fact, as Hegel shows in the *Phenomenology*, garbled forms of philosophy lead to obstructions to faith (as in the remarkable discussion of "The Enlightenment struggle against superstition"), whereas more traditional and less philosophical forms of representation do not have the same problems.¹²

¹¹ Here, as elsewhere, Theunissen (focusing on the *Encyclopaedia*) is exemplary: see Theunissen, *Hegels Lehre*, pp. 371ff.; this is taken up by Vetö: see Vetö, *De Kant à Schelling*, vol. 2, p. 209ff.

¹² On "The Enlightenment struggle against superstition" see Nicholas Adams, "Faith and Reason," in Adams (ed.), *The Impact of Idealism*, vol. 4: *Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming).

Hegel thus continues the discussion with reflections on these non-philosophical modes of approaching truth: he aims to do justice to them, and to make their integrity explicit, in a way that avoids false oppositions. People have gut reactions to truth: "Yes, that is the truth." We should take these gut reactions seriously, because they are what guide people's lives. Hegel describes them as immediate and positive, and as not generated through the concept. Such gut reactions need to be treated as forms of thinking, rather than as things that are opposed to thinking. Gut reactions inform practices of drawing conclusions, chains of reasoning, and giving explanations.

Doctrines too function in a "positive" non-philosophical way: people accept them and are guided by them. The Bible functions in this way too: it resonates for them, and generates and lends solidity to their beliefs. This too is best treated as a matter of thinking, rather than some inadequate substitute for thinking. People deliberate and think and consider, all in relation to what they accept in scripture. Hegel almost says that people reason scripturally. These forms of thinking are mapped in the academy through the scholarly activity of theology, but this is but one way of describing the witness of the spirit. The witness of the spirit is not produced by theology, but only described in it. The production is something independent that does not need theology to take place. Everyone interprets the Bible, Hegel says. As soon as one interprets scripture, one is engaged in thinking, and indeed in theology, however rudimentary. Theology as a scholarly discipline is different only in degree, not in kind: it orders these practices of interpretation in a particular way.

The practice of reflecting on the rules that guide interpretations of scripture is not a theological practice, for Hegel: "The investigation of these forms of thinking falls to philosophy alone" (*LPR* 3:260; *VPR* 3:25). Theology is a practice that interprets scripture, and is suffused with complex forms of thinking. The most complex forms of all are found in theology as a scholarly discipline. But *investigating* these forms does not belong to theology: *that* kind of logical investigation is philosophical. Hegel thus says that forms of theology that take against philosophy are very confused indeed. Philosophy, as it investigates the logics that guide theology, is indispensable for any theology that wishes to undertake its work at the highest level of sophistication. The kind of theology that is suspicious of philosophy is a theology that pursues an extreme rational voluntarism, and wishes to protect its right to think as it pleases, without awkward philosophical accounts of that thinking.

Hegel's account of the witness of the spirit thus turns out to be a way of talking about the relation between theology and philosophy: it is a second-order discourse, rather than being itself a mode of doing theology. The relation is not a complex one, although doing it is extremely strenuous. Theology is a form of thinking. Philosophy is a form of investigation into that thinking. To do theology in a way that is philosophically adequate is to

engage in forms of thinking in a self-conscious and explicit fashion. Philosophy cannot do that thinking: it is dependent on varieties of prior thinking, which it can then investigate. Theology cannot do that investigation: in order to investigate thinking, philosophical tools are needed. Theologians doubtless have their naïve moments. Like natural scientists who fool themselves that the facts speak for themselves, theologians may claim that they merely articulate the plain sense of the Bible. They are mistaken. “The instant [their thoughts] are no longer the actual words of the Bible, their content takes on a form, indeed a logical form” (LPR 3:258; VPR 3:24). One does not need to be aware that one’s thoughts are structured logically, any more than M. Jourdain is aware that he is speaking prose in Molière’s *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme*. But Hegel makes a stronger and rather extraordinary claim about the relation of theology to philosophy. He refers to this lack of awareness as “contingent thinking” (*ein zufälliges Denken*), and argues that it becomes mired in “finite thinking” (*das endliche Denken*) which is unable to comprehend the divine. Comprehending the divine requires a more complex relation of finitude and infinitude in thinking:

Through such finite thinking and comprehending of the divine, of what is in and for itself, through this finite thinking of the absolute content, it has come about that the basic doctrines of Christianity have largely disappeared from dogmatic theology. Philosophy is the principal, if not the sole, locus of what is essentially orthodox. The propositions that have always been valid – the fundamental truths of Christianity – are conserved and preserved by philosophy. (LPR 3:261–262)

Durch solch endliches Denken und Erfassen des Göttlichen, dessen, was an und für sich ist, durch dies endliche Denken des absoluten Inhalts ist es geschehen, daß die Grundlehren des Christentums aus der Dogmatik größtenteils verschwunden sind. Nicht allein, aber doch vornehmlich die Philosophie ist es, die jetzt wesentlich orthodox ist; die Sätze, die immer gegolten haben, die Grundwahrheiten des Christentums werden von ihr erhalten und aufbewahrt. (VPR 3:26–27)

This is a dense passage that requires some care. In Hegel’s view, the neglect shown by theology for logical investigations into its own thinking has had disastrous consequences for theology itself. What he calls “the basic doctrines of Christianity” concern speech about God that is not restricted to the finitude of merely contingent thinking. Hegel does not elaborate what this might mean. We can make some educated guesses, though. God is infinite, eternal, transcendent. To try to grasp this in forms of thought that deal only in the finite is impossible. For this reason these basic doctrines have

been edged out of forms of “finite” theology and replaced by various forms of pietism and rationalism. But philosophy is concerned with the infinite at the very heart of the structure of its thinking. It deals in truth that is not tied to finite representations, but is expressed in absolute knowing, in the concept. Because philosophy surpasses finitude in this way, while still preserving the truth of that finitude, it is the orthodox Christian discipline *par excellence*, rather than theology. Only if theology can regain a proper relation to philosophy can theology once again be the authentic voice of the orthodox Christian tradition. Hegel does not phrase it quite this unequivocally. “For the most part” there is a problem in theology. Philosophy is not the sole locus of orthodoxy. But Hegel does not identify the fruitful areas of contemporary theology, nor does he specify the loci other than philosophy where such orthodoxy is to be found.

We can return to the question as to whether Hegel is doing theology or not. He is certainly reflecting on theology and, indeed, on doctrine, in a sophisticated way. Hegel addresses the false oppositions which are obstructing the work of theology, but does not generally undertake that work himself. He laments the fact that philosophy is the guardian of orthodoxy: this is not a triumph for philosophy over theology, but a dismal prospect for theology and philosophy alike. In some ways, Hegel is best read as a willing servant to theology. But he is a servant frustrated with his queen. She thinks she needs no servants, and because of that, she is not only failing to govern her realm adequately, but is failing to be queen at all. It is with this frame in view that we turn to the theme in the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* in which Hegel seems to collapse the distinction between divine and human action: part of the discussion of the Holy Spirit, which culminates in the bold phrase “God existing as community” (*Gott als Gemeinde existierend*) (LPR 3:331; VPR 3:198).

We are concerned with what is now generally referred to as volume 3 of the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*. As Hegel did not publish these lectures, he neither produced nor named this volume: it is generally known as *Die vollendete Religion*, or *The Consummate Religion*. It contains Hegel’s investigations into Christianity. Some account of the other volumes is at this point briefly in order. The first volume contains Hegel’s lectures on the concept of religion, and lays out his conception of the task of the philosophy of religion. The second volume, which is by far the longest, contains his investigations into the various religious traditions on which there was, in the period before 1821, a considerable literature on which Hegel might draw. Hegel was certainly in no hurry to get to Christianity, as the detail of his other inquiries shows, and his remarks on Greek and Roman religions repay careful reading. The second volume also contains his brief remarks about Judaism. These look today not only unsatisfactory but odd. This is because Hegel’s source for these remarks is the Old Testament:

he shows little evidence of awareness of a living Judaism in his own time, and does not engage rabbinical literature. By the time we arrive at the final set of lectures, which in the 1821 manuscript is headed *Die vollendete oder offenbare Religion* (the consummate or revelatory religion), the reader is prepared for an investigation into the highest form of religious life.

It is worth pausing to notice the obvious: in his system of classification Hegel presents an explicit hierarchy of religious traditions, in which Christianity is at the apex, and he offers an explicitly supersessionist account of Christianity, in which all other traditions (including Judaism) function as case studies for comparison, in which they generally fare poorly. These are not views that Hegel arrives at hastily: they are very much his considered views, which he presents at length. One could perhaps attempt some kind of defense of Hegel by comparing his views with those of others of his time; one could also note that Hegel was not well informed, especially about Judaism and Islam. It is more interesting, I think, not to defend him too quickly, but to think with Hegel in a charitable way, and to get at the deep structure of his emphatic elevation of Christianity above all other religious traditions, past and present. Such a practice does not prevent one rejecting his supersessionism; indeed it enables the reader to have a much clearer sense of what exactly one might wish to, and should, reject.

Some broad remarks can be made along these lines. First, Hegel rehearses a pattern familiar from the *Phenomenology* and the *Science of Logic*. There is a qualitative distinction between forms of thinking through representations (*Vorstellungen*) and forms of thinking through the concept (*Begriff*). For Hegel, Christianity is consummate because it displays both forms of thinking. In marginal notes to the opening of his lectures on Christianity he writes *Christliche Religion ganz spekulativ – kann nur gefaßt werden als spekulativer Inhalt*. “Entirely speculative.” “Can only be understood as speculative content.” The meaning of speculative is familiar to us from his previous investigations. Hegel means that this form of thinking – speculative thinking – is not tied to concrete images and examples, but can present its content in a formal fashion. One can look at two-dimensional and three-dimensional representations of objects, and can get some idea of what “two-dimensional” and “three-dimensional” are: this idea is tied to visual examples. But if one asks “what is a dimension?” any satisfactory answer will no longer be undertaken with reference to examples, especially if one starts to what it might mean to have four or more dimensions. Such things as quarks and dark matter are speculative in Hegel’s sense: they express forms of thinking that are products of formal reasoning. Fundamental linguistic building blocks in natural science – words like “energy” or “force” in physics, for example – are speculative concepts in Hegel’s sense. In Christianity the fundamental building blocks will be words like “Trinity,” “life,” and “spirit.” For Hegel, other religious traditions can be adequately

grasped without investigating “speculative” content: they are “determinate” (*bestimmt*) in Hegel’s vocabulary. They are about stuff – whether nature religions concerned with tree spirits, or aesthetic religions concerned with gods who express the community’s ideals. Christianity, by contrast, is an expression of the fundamental structure of human thinking, in which the object of thought and the subject who thinks are recognized as a unity – spirit – in which the divine does not appear merely over and against humanity, but is understood to be one with humanity, where divine life pervades all action. Whereas for other religions the gods were expressions of the community’s life, but were thought of as over and against humanity, in Christianity the community’s life participates in God’s life, and is thought of as such. The ascent from the most primitive to the consummate religion is an ascent from a focus on things (trees, rivers, etc.) through ideals (Greek gods expressing the community’s self-understanding, but not recognized as such), to spirit that knows itself to be spirit (Christianity).

There are at least two ways of interpreting Hegel here. One can, as Hegel does, produce a description of the fundamental structure of human thinking, and then measure the various religious traditions against this structure, until one finds one that fits. Hey presto: Christianity fits! Hegel produces an account of spirit, and then “finds” that Christianity is a religion of spirit. This is numbingly naïve. One comes better at it entirely the other way round. It is because Hegel is a Christian that he thinks in the ways he does. It is because Christianity is a religion of spirit that Hegel produces his account of spirit in the first place. It is because Christianity “invents” history, because of its focus on the incarnation, which is not timeless, but which can be identified at a moment in time, that Hegel thinks historically. It is because Christianity is Trinitarian that Hegel thinks triadically. And so on. In other words the investigation which produces the account of spirit and the investigation that identifies Christianity as the consummate religion are not two independent investigations which by good fortune happen to converge, but one complex investigation undertaken in a variety of ways. Hegel does not think like this, however. If he did, he would not be able to produce a hierarchy of religions. He would have to produce alternative conceptualities *out of those traditions*, rather than seeing them as deficient expressions of the conceptualities produced by his own tradition. He would need to be more, in a word, ethnographic. (Although, again, the condition of the possibility of ethnography is culturally specific, and is rooted in certain imperial, commercial, and missionary activities.)

In other words, Hegel identifies the Christian logic with the logic of reality itself. In his account of reality, which traverses the world’s religious traditions, he finds himself at the end, at the apex of reality, and that apex is Christianity. But before one finds fault with Hegel, it is worth pointing out (especially to theologians) that the Christian tradition does exactly what

Hegel does. It identifies the Father as creator, Christ the Son as logos, and the Holy Spirit as the giver of life itself. Its biblical ontology is taken to be the real. Its Trinitarian logic is taken to govern the real. The difference between Hegel and the Christian tradition is that the latter has continued to develop beyond the nineteenth century, and it is now possible for theologians to acknowledge a plurality of ontologies (more common) and a plurality of logics (less common). Who in their right mind would find fault with Hegel for thinking in nineteenth-century ways? If Hegel is not curious enough about other religious traditions, and too willing to judge their adequacy against ontological and logical criteria that are produced by the same tradition that he finds to be the consummate religion, that names tasks for the current generation as much as it condemns Hegel.

Now that we are clear that Hegel identifies Christianity as the consummate religion, and have some idea what he means by this, and what is at stake, we can turn to the detail of his descriptions of the relation of divine and human action. We will do so three times, once for each of the principal lecture series. (The sources for the 1831 lectures are spare, and do not include material on this topic.)

The 1821 Lectures

We start in the 1821 lecture manuscript. To repeat what was said before, Hegel is not primarily producing a doctrine of God, or debating alternative ways of doing Christology. These are first-order theological practices, and Hegel is engaged in second-order descriptions of the ways of thinking that are displayed in doctrines of God or Christologies. He does, however, have to define what “God” means for this religious tradition. This definition is, again, not intended primarily to be a contribution to doctrine, but a description of what Christians are thinking when they say “God.” “Determination of God, that he is the *absolute* idea, the absolute, i.e., that he is *spirit*” (*Bestimmung Gottes, daß er die absolute Idee ist, die absolute, d.i. daß er der Geist ist*) (LPR 3:66; VPR 3:74a).¹³

Hegel then offers three glosses on what is entailed by saying that spirit is absolute idea. These are, first, that it is the unity of concept (*Begriff*) and reality (*Realität*); second, the unity of spirit is the unity of divine and human nature, which is revealed; third, this cannot be stated as a proposition but

¹³ The form of the lecture manuscript is a set of notes. I have not attempted to turn these into complete sentences, as Hodgson’s team of translators do in their English translation: I have left them as notes. The effect of complete sentences is to lose the experimental feel of Hegel’s thinking and to render its tone rather more emphatic.

is the process by which the unity “in itself” (*an ihm selbst*) becomes “for itself” (*für sich*) (LPR 3:66; VPR 3:74a).

This is highly compressed. Hegel is concerned with the second-order question of what kind of thinking is displayed in speech about God as spirit. Christian kinds of thinking display a concern with unity (*Einheit*) and process (*Prozess*). In many forms of common logic, the concept is taken to be distinct from reality. There are the ideas in my head; there is the world out there; I wonder how these are related to each other.

For Hegel Christianity displays a different logic. Concept (our idea of God) and reality (who God is in himself) are distinct but also one: to speak of absolute idea is to identify this alternative logic in which the opposition of concept to reality is overcome. In this alternative logic “reality thinks” or “thinking produces.”

It is interesting that if one tries to make sense of Hegel’s description within the bounds of the common logic, in which concept is taken to be distinct from reality, the whole thing unravels pretty quickly. To say “reality thinks” sounds, according to this logic, as though Hegel has a bizarre metaphysical picture in which some great monster, which he calls spirit, is engaged in thinking, and we are somehow mere effects of this thought. God in effect swallows up creation, as though he were Leviathan. To say “thinking produces” sounds, according to this logic, as though Hegel has the bizarre hyper-Fichtean view that all reality is nothing more than the effects of our thinking. Humanity thinks God (and everything else) into existence. These two bizarre views have been attributed to Hegel, from time to time. The best one can say of them is that they show how entrenched common logics, which split thinking and being, are in the patterns of thinking of even very well educated philosophers. But in the end one has to offer an account that takes Hegel’s alternative logic seriously. To speak of a unity of concept and reality is a sign that this alternative logic is operative. To speak of the unity of divine and human nature is a fruit of this alternative logic. To describe this unity as a process, which unfolds historically, rather than a state of affairs, which can be captured in a proposition, is to be guided by this alternative logic.

If this all sounds rather abstract, there are more familiar turns of phrase that might do justice to it. There is no talk about human action that is not simultaneously talk about divine action. There is no talk about the human that is not inextricably bound up with talk about spirit. There is no talk of creation without talk of its creator. There is no talk about God without talk about revelation. More fundamentally: there is no talk of objects without talk of the subject who thinks objects.

The thing to notice about these displays of the alternative logic is that they concern “talk.” There is no claim to some kind of immediate or privileged access to God. Hegel is not asking, “what can we know of God?”.

He is asking, “when Christians know God, what kinds of thinking are displayed?”. And the answer to that question is: “kinds of thinking which display an alternative logic, in which there is a unity of concept and reality, and of divine and human nature.” He is also saying, “when Christians claim not to be able to know God, they have betrayed their tradition.”

The main point, to repeat, is that Hegel’s definition of God is an opportunity to display how Christians think when they talk of God, and to contrast this thinking with what one finds in other religious traditions, and also in the thinking of Christians when they fail to display the thinking which their tradition makes possible and indeed demands.

Having set out the kind of thinking in play, Hegel then investigates various obstacles to allowing this unifying logic to shape theological discourse. With these ground rules established, Hegel turns to a discussion of the Trinity.

The unwary reader is generally inclined to wonder what Hegel has to say about the Trinity. This is not quite the right question, in my view. It is much better to wonder what Hegel has to say about Christian thinking when it speaks of God as Trinity. Hegel thus investigates shapes of thinking, and describes the logics that generate them, in relation to triunity, creation, the fall, the idea of unity of divine and human in Christ, the teaching of Christ, the life and death of Christ, and the resurrection and ascension of Christ. In each case, Hegel is interested in how the “idea” is generative of forms of thought in Christianity. In nearly every case these forms of thought display a logic in which false oppositions are overcome. Hegel lays out the process by which separations are made, how the separations within the divine idea are reunited, and how this process becomes something that is explicit for the tradition.

Hegel sums up a discussion of materials that extend up until the ascension of Christ as having concerned itself with different spheres. These are (1) the eternal God in his pure idea in thinking spirit and (2) the universal realizing itself (a) in nature, entirely external existence, the true self-emptying (*wahrhafte Entäußerung*); (b) in an externality that is also radical inwardness, in finite spirit that is therefore the consummation of externality where its separation is deepest, to the negative known as negative, and thus the return to the eternal idea which here has its (at first abstract) realization in the self-consciousness to the eternal spirit.

This is Hegel’s summary of a large portion of the preceding discussion, so it is not surprising that it is so dense. But even if the nuances are puzzling, the shape of thinking is explicit: there is a separating, an overcoming of that separation, and a return where the movement is self-conscious. The reference to self-consciousness is crucial here, as elsewhere in Hegel. The point is not that there is separation, overcoming, and return (although without that, there would be no point to make). It is that *in the community’s thinking*,

there is a separation and an overcoming, and that this process itself becomes something the community explicitly thinks about. Christian thinking does not just perform certain gestures. It knows that it makes them, and makes them explicit for itself. It is thus misleading to focus on Hegel's account of the separation, the overcoming, and the return, as if this is somehow a description of a divine drama. It is partly that, but this is just scene-setting for the real action. *Hegel is interested in the kind of logic that makes its own moves explicit.* Christianity thinks the way it does not just because of what it thinks, but because it makes its own thinking explicit to itself. The self-consciousness is integral to the logic. Up until this point, however, the movement has only been performed in relation to God as Creator and God as Son. Hegel draws attention to the locus of the drama in the person of Jesus Christ. This has the logical structure of a self-consciousness about the overcoming of separation. But this overcoming takes place only in the case of a singular individual, in this case Jesus Christ. For the movement to be completed, it has to incorporate the entire community.

It might appear that Hegel is somehow playing the persons of the Trinity off against each other. It might appear as if the Father performs his part and then gives way to the Son, who performs his part, and then the Son too gives way to the Spirit, in which everything is completed. But this is to treat Hegel's discussion as a first-order theological investigation into divine action. Hegel's interest is much deeper than this, and he makes no claims about divine action from a God's-eye point of view. Hegel shows no tendency at all to see things from a God's-eye point of view, in fact. Rather, he is investigating the forms of thought displayed in the doctrine of the Trinity. The story of creation and fall is one of separation. The story of the teaching, life, death, resurrection and ascension of Christ is one of reconciliation. It is the logic of the story that Hegel is investigating. He is not trying to retell the story, and certainly not in such a way as to change the story. The story is the story. It is a distraction to inquire into the "Hegelian" version of the story. But there is a Hegelian version of the logic that is displayed in how the community thinks about the story, and it is this thinking that Hegel is elaborating. Obviously he cannot avoid telling the story at the same time. But it is a grave (and instantly ruinous) error to mistake Hegel's claims about the logic for a distorted retelling of the Christian story. There are many signposts in the text to prevent this from happening, above all the constant references to self-consciousness, to idea, to concept, and so forth. These are obviously displays of logic, not of narrative. It is possible to read Hegel as producing his own bizarre narrative in which things like "self-consciousness" or "idea" or "concept" constitute the *dramatis personae* of theology. But to do this is to ignore all of Hegel's entirely explicit claims to be investigating forms of thinking. It is much better to presume that the *dramatis personae* of the narrative are the persons of the Trinity, and that the narrative is the narrative of the Church, not the narrative of Hegel. The

logical terms are used not to produce a different narrative, but to explain what kind of thinking is displayed in the uses of that original narrative.

When Hegel says that the narrative of Jesus Christ concerns “only” one singular individual, he does not mean that there is some deficiency here – that somehow Jesus Christ is after all only one guy, and what is needed is for everyone to be part of the story: cue a big ensemble number with parts for everyone. No. Hegel means that the logic of the story is one in which the separation and reconciliation are narrated in such a way as, first of all, to be focused on the person of Jesus Christ, and then progressively to include more and more agents, until finally the entire community is part of the action. When the entire community participates, the logic of the story is “brought to completion.” It is not the story that is brought to completion, but the logic of the story. The gradual inclusion of wider agency is not primarily a mark of the story, but of the logic. *It is the logic that is progressively inclusive.*

If anyone is in any doubt about this, then it is worth paying attention to the headings that Hegel gives in the lecture manuscript, when he is treating the three persons of the Trinity. They are not headed “Father,” “Son,” and “Holy Spirit.” They are headed “A. Abstract Concept,” “B. Concrete Representation,” and “C. Community, Cultus.” The structure is manifestly one of what I am calling “logic” rather than of narrative. Further evidence is furnished by the fact that Hegel shifts this logical structure substantially in the 1824 lectures, while the narrative remains the same. Hegel did not fundamentally change his mind about the Trinity in the intervening three years: he was experimenting with different explications of the logical structure.

The section on “Community, Cultus” is the focus of my claim that Hegel’s interest in logical structure has implications for how one understands the relation of divine and human action. Hegel is not just commending the Christian logic as a way of governing talk about divine and human action. He offers a particular account of that logic. In that account, the difference between divine and human action is very heavily qualified, and we are interested in whether the force of this logical account has a warping effect on the narrative that – supposedly – the logical analysis merely reports.

Hegel’s discussion of the community is a discussion of logic, rather than a historical discussion of the community. He opens the section by explicitly ruling out any discussion of the empirical history of the Church. Instead he is interested in tracking the logic by which “the idea” makes a transition to “sensible presence.” Hegel uses strong language in this section. For him, what makes Christianity distinctive is precisely its concern with ordinary things (like “sensible presence”) at the same time as it is concerned with divine action. Unlike oriental religions, Christianity does not renounce the sensible in order to pursue the divine. It is a religion of spirit, in which the false opposition between the sensible and the divine is overcome, and in

which this overcoming is something about which it is entirely self-conscious. Hegel describes failures to grasp this overcoming, failures in which the sensible is despised or rejected, as “cowardice” and “nauseating snobbery.”

Hegel understands Christian speech about love to be an explicit, self-conscious embrace of sensible presence. Such love is not a feeling: it is the discovery of a relation with an other in which one can be truly oneself:

This sphere of infinite love therefore the kingdom of spirit – to know in oneself infinite worth, absolute freedom, in oneself as this individual, and this infinite power to receive oneself in this radically other. (LPR 3:135)

Diese Sphäre der unendlichen Liebe deswegen das Reich des Geistes – in sich den unendlichen Wert, absolute Freiheit zu wissen, in sich als diesem Individuum, und diese unendliche Macht, in diesem schlechthin Anderen sich selbst zu erhalten. (VPR 3:96a)

In this sphere there is no competition between persons; the other is not an inconvenient limitation on my freedom, but is the occasion of that genuine freedom; the other is not a check on my selfhood: love is the infinite power through which, in relation to this other, I receive myself.

The effect of this logic of divine love is a religion in which worldly power and worldly glory are given up, and are given up in an emphatic and polemical way. This logic of love is concentrated, Hegel says, in this individual – Christ – at first. This is an overwhelming presence: “this is the only sensible presence that has value.” The love of Christ eclipses all other possible agents and objects of love. (Hegel notes that being in love can be like this, but such romantic love runs counter to divine love, because both my own subjectivity and the object of my love become possessions.)

Hegel understands the death of Christ (and his subsequent ascension) to be the withdrawal of this overwhelming presence. Infinite love is now experienced as infinite pain. This infinite pain is the condition for a newly awakened subjectivity in which divine love is no longer concentrated overwhelmingly in the singular person of Jesus Christ but is dispersed in the community. At the level of narrative, the person of Jesus Christ is withdrawn. At the level of logic, however, the idea is given more fully:

That love as in infinite pain is indeed the concept of spirit itself; it is *object* in Christ as the epicenter of faith – *in an infinite distance, majestic dignity*, but in infinite nearness, particularity, *belongingness* to the individual subject. (LPR 3:140)

Jene Liebe als im unendlichen Schmerz ist eben der Begriff des Geistes selbst, sie ist *Gegenstand* in Christus als dem Mittelpunkt des Glaubens – *in einer unendlichen Ferne, Hoheit*, aber in unendlicher Nähe, Eigentümlichkeit, *Angehörigkeit* dem individuellen Subjekte. (VPR 3:97b)

Things which at the level of common logic are opposites – subject and object, distance and nearness, universality and particularity – are in this logic of love utterly bound up with each other. With the death of Christ divine love is unapproachably distant and yet utterly and availably near. Christ as object of faith is simultaneously the most precious individual mark of the Christian subject.

This, then, marks the transition to the “community, cultus” in these lectures. God is no longer “over there,” as he is in other religious traditions. God’s love is simultaneously absent and present, infinite pain and (in a strange contraction) “the only genuinely speculative” (LPR 3:141; VPR 3:98a). The logic is emphatically one of overcoming false oppositions, and this logic is produced by the narrative of overcoming separation between God and world, which Hegel calls “the infinite antithesis.” In the narrative, “the holy spirit is poured out over the disciples; from that point on they are as community, which is their immanent life.” At the level of logic, “subjects entangled in process; the divine idea, which is for them as infinite love in infinite pain, is indeed in this intuition in them, they the community of spirit” (LPR 3:142; VPR 3:98b).¹⁴ Christianity’s logic of love is also a logic of participation.

Hegel explicitly distinguishes between the alternative logic he identifies in the Christian story and the common logics which display false oppositions. He says of the first that “it is only *recent philosophy* which arrived at this depth of the concept.” The second he criticizes as “*unphilosophical superficiality*.” The recent philosophy (Hegel’s) is able to do justice to the story, in which there is separation and reconciliation, pain and healing, the one (Christ) and the many (the community). The purveyors of unphilosophical superficiality make a great show of “philosophizing,” but remain mired in contradiction (*Widerspruch*), which I have been glossing as “false oppositions.”

It is on this note of criticism that Hegel closes his lectures – thus ending any doubt about the emphasis on logic that Hegel sustains throughout them, and also drawing attention to the problems for theology that bad logic introduces:

At the point where the doctrines of religion *representation*, the merely given, the need for *thinking* as reflective thinking; it is what causes the firm to falter, what disintegrates everything dialectically and brings everything back to the subjective, whether reduced to an empty abstraction of the *universal* or to *feelings*. (LPR 3:160)

In dem Punkte, daß die Lehren der Religion *Vorstellung*, Gegebenes, *Denken* als reflektierendes Denken Bedürfnis; es ist es, welches das Feste wankend macht, dialektisch alles auflöst und alles zurückführt zum Subjektiven, es sei einer leeren Abstraktion des *Allgemeinen* oder auf *Gefühle* reduziert. (VPR 3:103b)

¹⁴ Hegel’s notes are not complete sentences at this point.

When doctrines remain at the level of representation they become mere facts – the brutally given, to use Milbank’s evocative phrase – and at the same time a superficial kind of pseudo-philosophy springs up which insists on various kinds of reflective thinking. This so-called thinking only succeeds in causing the entire edifice to shudder, however, because it acts like acid on the tradition. Instead of doing justice to complex pairs like love/pain, subject/object, divine/human, individual/community it resolves them in utterly one-sided ways. Generally speaking these are at the subjective end of the spectrum, and they take one of two equally vacuous forms. Either such thinking produces empty abstractions about the universal, which remain utterly disconnected from the lived experience of the individual. Or it produces an emphasis on mere feelings, in which any attempt to grasp truth is completely abdicated.

Ordinary folk are the big losers in this unhappy situation. Ordinary folk display a thinking that overwhelmingly takes the form of representations, and this is entirely appropriate. Philosophy is not for everybody, and one does not need to grasp the shape of the Christian logic to be guided by it. These ordinary folk have been short-changed by those who are responsible for teaching them.

Abandoned by their teachers – who have helped themselves through reflection, who have found gratification in finitude, subjectivity and indeed thereby in vanity. But the vast majority of ordinary people cannot find gratification there.
(LPR 3:161)

Verlassen von seinen Lehrern – die haben sich durch Reflexion geholfen, in der Endlichkeit, Subjectivität, und eben damit im Eitlen ihre Befriedigung gefunden, wo aber jener substantielle Kern des Volkes die seinige nicht finden kann.
(VPR 3:103b)

These teachers have undermined the power of representational thinking, and offer nothing accessible to replace it. Real philosophy does justice to representational thinking, and raises its genuine and authentic wisdom to the level of the concept, by mapping the logic at work in the representational forms of thinking. Sham philosophy pooh-poohs representational thinking, and then behind closed doors concocts its own ersatz logic. But this turns out to be mere finitude and subjectivity – a poor and thin substitute for the divine idea. Ordinary people won’t find any nourishment there, and the representations that were (quite rightly) their nourishment are no longer available because the sham philosophers have cast doubt on them – a doubt which ordinary people now share because they pay attention to the sham philosophers.

Hegel ends with a distinctly downbeat assessment. Those whose task is to care for ordinary believers have abdicated their responsibilities, and are damaging the tradition. Philosophers like Hegel may well be able to act as guardians of tradition: “religion to take flight in philosophy,” his notes say. But this kind of philosophy is highly specialized work, and is not suitable as formation for the man and woman in the pew. One may well wonder how things will turn out for the tradition, given this sorry state of affairs. Hegel does not offer much consolation: the kind of philosophy that can raise representational thinking to the level of the concept is not much use for the practical guidance of the Church. It can only preserve the truth, and wait.

The 1824 Lectures

The structure of the 1824 lectures is close to that of the 1821 series, although Hegel did group the material slightly differently in some places. There is evidence to suggest that Hegel made use of his 1821 lecture manuscript when delivering the 1824 lectures (there are marginal additions to the MS which correspond to transcriptions of the 1824 lectures).

Editors of the *Lectures* face some challenges in deciding how to title the sections in the 1824 lectures. Decisions about section titles reflect in an interesting way what editors take Hegel to be doing, and this issue provides an occasion here to reinforce my prior remarks about the difference between first-order and second-order investigations. Jaeschke (in his German critical edition) and Hodgson (in his English version of Jaeschke’s) make different judgments, and for ease of comparison they are laid out here in outline. Pages numbers refer to the German edition, whose pagination Hodgson retains in the margins of his edition

Jaeschke		Hodgson	
[No title]	99–108	Intro: 1. Consummate Religion	99–105
		2. Revelatory Religion	105–106
		3. Religion of Truth and Freedom	106–108
A. Metaphysical Concept	108–119	I. The Metaphysical Concept of God	108–119
B. Concrete Representation	119–176	II. The Development of the Idea of God	119–176
First Element	122–131	First Element: The Idea of God	122–131
Second Element	131–153	Second Element: Representation	131–153
Third Element	153–176	Third Element: Community, Spirit	153–176
Origin of Community	155–163	1. Origin of Community	155–163
Subsistence of Community	163–167	2. Subsistence of Community	163–167
Realization of Faith	167–176	3. Realization of Faith	167–176

The 1821 Manuscript was organized into three sections: “Abstract Concept,” “Concrete Representation,” “Community, Cultus.” Hodgson

suggests that the 1824 lectures are arranged into two: “The Metaphysical Concept of God” and “The Development of the Idea of God.”¹⁵ This inspires Hodgson’s departure from Jaeschke’s titles:

To highlight the structural difference between the 1824 lectures and the *Ms.* at this point we prefer “The Development of the Idea of God” as a title, although “Concrete Representation” could also be used, and indeed the latter is found as a heading in *D*, *P*, and *Ho*. But in 1824, “Concrete Representation” *includes* “Community, Cultus” as the third element.¹⁶

There are a number of features to notice, but we can single out just one: it is interesting to note where “Representation” is assigned in the scheme. In Jaeschke it is assigned to 57 pages (the entire second section, which makes up the bulk of the lectures). In Hodgson it is assigned to 22 pages (to the “second element”). Regardless of how well-attested these titles are in the various sources, this reflects a strong judgment by Hodgson about the structure of the 1824 lectures, which he takes to be in two parts, compared with the three parts in 1821. But Hodgson also seems to take account of the obvious fact that the bulk of the 1821 material occurs in the second main section of the 1824 lectures, which Jaeschke calls “Concrete Representation” and which Hodgson calls “Development of the Idea of God.” Hodgson seems to balk at the suggestion that the entire Trinity can be subsumed under “Concrete Representation.” His reasons for this reserve are given in a passing comment, which is offered as friendly guidance for the reader, in an earlier part of his note to the 1824 lectures:

The idea of God “develops” (for the consummate religion, at least) in terms of the three moments of the Trinity – in representational language, the “persons” of the Father, Son, and Spirit; in conceptual language, the moments of divine self-identity, self-differentiation, and self-return. These yield the three “elements” that constitute the substance of Hegel’s speculative redescription of the Christian religion.¹⁷

Hodgson maps “conceptual language” onto “representational language” in a one-to-one relation. Father is self-identity; Son is self-differentiation, Spirit is self-return. This one-to-one relation is, Hodgson says, a “speculative redescription of the Christian religion.” This is a substantial judgment about

¹⁵ See note 39 to p. 73 and note 65 to p. 185 of Hodgson’s edition of the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*.

¹⁶ Hodgson should also have pointed out that Jaeschke does in fact use “Concrete Representation.” It is worth noting that in general Hodgson displays a strong preference for sub-headings for sections, where Jaeschke is more restrained.

¹⁷ Hodgson, note 65 to p. 185.

what kind of project Hegel is engaged in. To Hodgson it is simply obvious that Hegel is redescribing Christian religion in speculative terms, and this motivates his clarification of what these redescriptions are, in his one-to-one relation.

This is a very common and common-sense approach to Hegel's project, and one which has two notable effects. First it has the happy result that Hegel is doing theology, but doing it speculatively. It becomes easy to investigate his Trinitarian thinking, because one is now equipped with the categories to map his discussion onto theology. When Hegel talks about "representation" he is talking about Jesus Christ (at least in Hodgson's title scheme). But it has the unhappy result that Hegel's theology is decidedly unorthodox, in so far as he "redescribes" Christian religion. The English-speaking reader of Hegel's *Lectures* is bound to ask: "but is Hegel really a Christian?" when reading this redescription. (With his customary directness, John Burbidge asks exactly this question, for precisely these reasons.¹⁸)

Jaeschke's scheme does not permit quite such an easy mapping. In Jaeschke's titles "Concrete Representation" covers the whole Trinity, whereas for Hodgson it covers only the section on the second person of the Trinity. And in Jaeschke's restrained title scheme, the Trinitarian material is just divided into first, second, and third elements – no further descriptions are offered. Hodgson explicitly calls the third element "Spirit," by contrast. Normally Hodgson cites titles in sources as support for his choices: here he just adds the title "Spirit" without offering any support. Again, it is just obvious to him that this is what Hegel must be doing. Jaeschke's choices (which are motivated by what the sources warrant rather than by any strong beliefs about what kind of project Hegel is engaged in) perhaps seemed rather puzzling to Hodgson. In the 1821 lectures, the title "Representation" made up the big second section which discusses the second person of the Trinity. It is surely strange to permit this title now to cover the whole of the Trinity. From Hodgson's one-to-one perspective, this makes it look as though the second person encompasses the whole Trinity. (This would be a strange worry to have: the more obvious worry would be that, in Hegel's philosophy, the third person dominates the whole Trinity.)

Jaeschke's scheme is to be preferred, for two reasons. First, it sticks closely to what the sources warrant. Second, it offers much less "help" to the reader, and this is a good thing. In my view, Hodgson is wrong to claim that Hegel is offering a speculative redescription of the Christian religion, and wrong to steer the reader to see that Hegel's titles (which are now inevitably viewed as somewhat idiosyncratic) are "just" redescriptions of Christian doctrinal loci. I think that if Hegel wanted to do Trinitarian

¹⁸ John Burbidge, *Hegel on Logic and Religion: The Reasonableness of Christianity* (New York: SUNY, 1992), pp. 93–107.

theology he would have stuck to the standard doctrinal language and spoken of “the first person” or “God the Father” etc. He does not. He uses language like “Abstract Concept” (1821) or “First Element” (1824). This is a sign that Hegel is not doing theology at all, but is doing the kind of thing in which abstract concepts and elements have their place. I have called this “second-order” or “logical” investigation. Hodgson’s “help” to the reader makes it very difficult to distinguish theological from logical inquiry. Most readers of Hodgson will surely assume that there is one kind of inquiry, and that it has two forms of description – the traditional description and Hegel’s redescription.¹⁹ That is not a helpful assumption, in my view.

Making a stronger distinction between theological and logical inquiry – a distinction that Hegel himself makes throughout the *Lectures* – enables one to see that in 1824 Hegel experimented with different ways of laying the logical lattice on the doctrinal material, rather than fundamentally rethinking the Trinity. Hodgson certainly avoids suggesting that there is any such rethinking – but he does so by altering the titles so as to avoid this danger. This is because Hodgson takes the titles to be descriptions of doctrinal loci, rather than descriptions of logical categories. Had Hodgson abandoned his one-to-one relation of “representational” and “conceptual” language, he could have moved the various logical titles around relatively freely, without worrying about the bizarre effects this might have on the doctrine of the Trinity – bizarre effects which Jaeschke’s scheme seems to have, from Hodgson’s perspective. In the end, even Hodgson knows at some level that the one-to-one mapping does not work: he refers to the traditional theological categories as “representational” language. This does not sit easily with the scheme Hodgson adopts, in which “representation” refers more specifically to the second person of the Trinity. In fact, calling the traditional categories “representational” sits much more readily with Jaeschke’s scheme, in which “representation” covers all three “elements” of the discussion of the doctrine of the Trinity.

All this is to say that Hegel is not primarily doing Trinitarian theology. He is doing logic. It is also to warn the English-speaking reader that Hodgson’s edition places some big obstacles in the way of seeing this, and because these obstacles are present at the level of the organization and titling of material, they obstruct at a deep level. It is worth saying, at this point, that Hodgson’s edition is genuinely superb when it comes to matters of detail, and offers a wealth of detail and interpretative assistance which is immensely useful. My

¹⁹ Martin De Nys assumes this, for example, as he responds to Hodgson, and remarks with regret that Hegel did not go further in such redescription. Martin De Nys, *Hegel and Theology* (London: T. & T. Clark, 2009), pp. 111–112; cf. Peter Hodgson, *Hegel and Christian Theology: A Reading of the Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 134.

observations are not about detail: they concern the bigger question of what kind of inquiry Hegel is engaged in.

Let us now turn briefly to the passage in the 1824 lectures which corresponds to the material on “the community” in the 1821 lectures. I shall use Jaeschke’s titles rather than Hodgson’s for the reasons elaborated.

Once again, Hegel makes the logical point that the “third element” concerns a transition from the “outer” appearance to the “inner” (*LPR* 3:223; *VPR* 3:259, echoing *LPR* 3:132; *VPR* 3:95a in the 1821 lectures). Whereas the logical inquiry into the second person of the Trinity shows that the infinite and finite are joined in Christian talk of Jesus Christ, the logical inquiry now shows that this joining happens for the individual subject. The “subject” is a logical term to describe the function of Christian talk about Jesus Christ: his self-consciousness of being infinite, eternal, immortal (*LPR* 3:223; *VPR* 3:259). This joining, which we can also call the overcoming of the false opposition of finite and infinite, or the healing of the “harsh antithesis,” is encountered first of all as sensible presence, i.e. as something external. To talk of spirit is to talk of this joining becoming internal: “This is the turn to the inner way, and this third realm is the realm of spirit as such – it is the community, the cultus, faith” (*LPR* 3:223; *VPR* 3:260).

Hegel adds a logical summary of the forms of thought displayed in Christian Trinitarian thinking, in relation to three determinations of the “manifestation” of God: first as revelatory (*offenbar*), second as appearance (*Erscheinung*), and third – now – as faith or knowledge, “for faith is also knowledge” (*Glaube ist auch Wissen*). This way of putting things is interesting, when interpreted as a logical claim. Faith and knowledge are, from the point of view of Cartesian and Kantian logics, separate. The logic that Hegel discerns in Christian thinking about the third person of the Trinity is not of this kind: in this alternative logic, the false opposition of faith and knowledge is overcome. Notice that this does not commit Hegel to the view that there is no distinction to be made between faith and knowledge (a view seemingly held by Jacobi, for example, as Hegel reads him). It articulates the deeper insight that they are not pitted against one another in a false opposition.

It is a significant challenge to hold on to this kind of insight when reading Hegel, because Hegel often uses identity language to signal the overcoming of false oppositions, in this case “faith is also knowledge.” It is very easy to think that Hegel is abolishing distinctions rather than overcoming false oppositions. If one takes the easy path, thinking that Hegel is abolishing distinctions, one is let off the hook of taking his logic seriously. Instead of having to juggle various repairs of false oppositions (with the corresponding strenuous task of thinking differently in relation to the pairs of terms), one can with a sigh of relief write Hegel off as simply bonkers. Everyone knows that faith and knowledge are different things! Hegel says they are the same.

Bonkers! By contrast, if one takes this alternative logic seriously, it emerges that questions of how claims to truth are warranted undergo a significant shift in Christian thinking about the doctrine of the Trinity, and instead of Cartesian and Kantian logics, which require one to offer warrants based on reason (Descartes) or experience (Kant) to support claims to knowledge, in Christian thinking truth is “produced” as one discovers that one participates in the truth. Hegel glosses this as the discovery that the false oppositions between “being” and “thinking” and between “subject” and “object” are overcome. One recognizes oneself, and one’s agency, in one’s relation with the other, where the other remains genuinely other and the self becomes genuinely self. Hegel makes the claim about the shift to a different logic explicit in a slightly earlier passage in the 1824 lectures:

As now regards the authentication of the individual [sc. Christ], this is essentially the witness of spirit, the indwelling idea, of spirit in itself. The latter is brought here to intuition; it is an immediate witness of the spirit given to spirit; this cognizes only the conceptualizing spirit in its truth-full necessity. Outer authentications are of a subordinate kind and do not belong here . . . all sensible authentication falls away. (*LPR* 3:220)

Was nun die Beglaubigung des Individuums anbetrifft, so ist diese wesentlich das Zeugnis des Geistes, der innewohnenden Idee, des Geistes an sich selbst. Dieser wird hier zur Anschauung gebracht; es ist ein unmittelbares Zeugnis des Geistes dem Geiste gegeben; dies erkennt nur der begreifende Geist in seiner wahrhaften Notwendigkeit. Die äußeren Beglaubigungen sind von untergeordneter Art und gehören nicht hierher. . . . darüber fällt alle sinnliche Beglaubigung weg. (*VPR* 3:255–256)

The rules for adducing warrants for belief that are found in Cartesian and Kantian logics no longer apply: “outer” authentications no longer “belong.” Hegel draws on Johannine language of the “indwelling spirit” to describe the “indwelling idea,” in order to capture the inner generation of a truth which, in Christian talk, simultaneously comes from outside (from God) and is truly inner (by virtue of participation, through the indwelling spirit). Any attempt to offer external warrants is subordinate, and cannot trump the basic logic displayed in talk about the indwelling spirit. Indeed, Hegel sees the great danger that presents itself when Christians try to support this “indwelling” logic with external warrants, such as appeals to miracles. The intrusion of external warrants does not support the logic of indwelling, but undermines it. Hegel, as we saw earlier, has significant things to say about miracles in all the lecture series, and in each case he tries to show

how appeals to (and attacks on) miracles display logical forms that are at odds with the deep logic of Christian speech in which the false opposition between divine and human action is overcome (*LPR* 3:146–149, 227–230, 253–255; *VPR* 3:100a–101a, 266–271, 21–23).

We can see, then, that if Hegel is bonkers for saying “faith is also knowledge,” this is because he takes seriously what he sees as the logic at work in Christian talk about the indwelling spirit, and the ways in which this logic is an alternative to Cartesian and Kantian logics which demand external warrants. One might say that Hegel is bonkers to the degree that the Christian tradition is bonkers. Of course, it is not only possible but manifestly actual that many Christians try to render their theologies according to the rules of Cartesian and Kantian logics. But Hegel thinks this is a disaster, and that it badly undermines the much more interesting – and not only interesting but genuinely transformative – logics that are at work in that same tradition. If one wanted to defend Hegel, one might ask the innocent question: “what warrants do Christians have for privileging Cartesian and Kantian logics, when treating questions of belief?”. The only warrants for logics are – as Hamann said very clearly in relation to any appeal to reason – tradition and use. No one “chooses” a logic! But everyone inhabits a logic – probably more than one. Most people (including some philosophers) are not aware that there are such things, in the plural, as logics. Most people (including some philosophers) think there is “logic” and that it is important to abide by it, if one’s arguments are to command assent. Hegel is a challenging figure because he discerns different logics, and explores the effects they have on theology. Many of those reading this study will have been taught to obey the rules of Cartesian and Kantian logics – they will naturally appeal to what Hegel calls “external” warrants, whether these are appeals to “reason” or to “experience.” It is important to see that appeals to “reason” are just as external as appeals to “experience,” according to Hegel’s account. Hegel wants to cure this dependence on errant logics. The logic he commends is not, he thinks, one of his own invention, but is a logic that he discerns at work in the doctrine of the Trinity. It is thus, from Hegel’s perspective, the utmost perversity to try to produce Trinitarian theology within the constraints imposed by the very Cartesian and Kantian logics that undermine that theology’s own logical possibilities. But that is what theologians do all the time.

This is a case where trying to render Hegel’s philosophy in a way that is acceptable to “common sense” is deeply wrong-headed. (The same goes for the doctrine of the Trinity itself.) It is not that Hegel’s philosophy does not make sense. If it does not make sense, we should abandon any study of it without delay, and stop wasting our precious time. Hegel does make sense, as many interpreters endeavor successfully to show. But the logic of “common sense” is only one possible logical structure for handling questions

of truth, and Hegel offers various alternatives, and the most interesting alternatives are logical structures that he discerns in Christian talk about the Trinity. Hegel launches a most interesting assault on common sense. To try to explain Hegel's thinking in common-sense terms is to strip it of what is most reparative for philosophy and generative for theology. Unfortunately, any "defense" of Hegel's philosophy will have to be conducted on something like "common-sense" grounds, because that is what a "defense" is – it is a demonstration that this or that does not violate the canons of common sense. This kind of defense often underlies accounts of what Hegel is generally taken to be doing. Hegel's philosophy is in my view an assault on common sense in some ways. This study embraces Hegel's project not in common-sense terms, but in the terms he himself commends. Hegel is not attempting explicitly to repair the damage done to philosophy by common-sense logics, because as a matter of historical development the dominance of common sense does not really take hold until the later nineteenth century, which feeds into certain strands of pragmatist and analytic philosophy. Were Hegel alive today, it is almost certain he would be attempting to cure his readers of the debilitating effects of common-sense logics on the capacity of theological thinking to transform the world. (His prime target would surely be C.S. Lewis, a reassuringly common-sense fellow in matters of theology if ever there was one. This would not be an attack on Lewis' theology, which Hegel might well commend, but on his logical tendencies.)

We can return to the question of the logic that underlies Christian talk of the spirit, a talk in which "faith is also knowledge." We are interested in any tendencies Hegel displays towards collapsing the distinction between divine and human action, which is the charge usually made against him. Hegel invites us to treat the question of logic by considering the logic of drama:

Here however we have ourselves moved away towards the realization of the idea, so that spirit is for spirit. What spirit is for spirit is as sensible consciousness. There are thus two for one another. The one side that we first make up confronts us objectively; just as in drama the audience has itself before itself as chorus, so here we have the standpoint where the content is for spirit, and this relationship is essentially what is to be considered. (LPR 3:224)

Hier aber nun sind wir selbst fortgegangen zur Realisierung der Idee, so daß der Geist für den Geist ist, und das, was der Geist für den Geist als sinnliches Bewußtsein ist. Es sind also zwei für einander; die eine Seite, die wir zunächst ausmachen, diese ist uns hier gegenständlich; gleichsam wie im Drama der Zuschauer sich als Chor gegenständlich vor sich hat, so ist hier der Standpunkt, daß der Inhalt ist für den Geist, und dies Verhältnis ist wesentlich zu betrachten. (VPR 3:262)

This nicely expresses Hegel's desire to commend a logic in which the false opposition between subject and object is overcome. He takes a familiar example from the structure of drama, and his reference to the chorus is a sign that he has in mind classical Greek drama. The audience in a Greek drama are not mere spectators. Their own agency is presented to them, objectively, in the action of the chorus. The chorus is a device for drawing the audience into the drama as participants with, quite literally, a voice. A similar logic is at work in Christian talk about the spirit. The content (spirit) confronts the agent (spirit). The object (spirit) confronts the subject (spirit). Talk of spirit displays a logic in which the false opposition between content and agent, object and subject, is overcome. It is consciousness of this process that generates the community, and brings it into being.

The origin of the community is the generation of the content for the community, for subjective self-consciousness. We have considered the idea first in the element of thinking, second as it realizes itself, and posits itself in difference. In the community the way is first in reverse order. Its beginning is from sensible appearance outwards. The progress is the discovery of this content in the emergence of doctrine. In other words, as was already said, the origin of the community is the generation of doctrine. The community is first immediate self-consciousness, and truth comes to it in this sensible way, as sensible determination, and not until it reaches eternal truth does it rise from this sensible way to be a community. (*LPR* 3:225)

Die Entstehung der Gemeinde ist Erzeugung des Inhalts für die Gemeinde, für das subjective Selbstbewußtsein. Wir haben die Idee zuerst im Element des Denkens betrachtet, zweitens wie sie sich daraus realisiert, sich in den Unterschied setzt. In der Gemeinde ist der Weg zunächst in umgekehrter Ordnung; ihr Anfang ist von der sinnlichen Erscheinung aus; der Fortgang ist das Erfinden, Hervorgehen der Lehre dieses Inhalts. Das ist, was gesagt ist, das Entstehen der Gemeinde sei die Erzeugung der Lehre. Die Gemeinde ist zunächst unmittelbares Selbstbewußtsein, und die Wahrheit kommt an sie in dieser sinnlichen Weise, als sinnliche Bestimmung, und sie erhebt sich erst, Gemeinde zu sein, von dieser sinnlichen Weise zur ewigen Wahrheit zu gelangen. (*VPR* 3:262–263)

Hegel notes the way that logical investigation proceeds in the opposite direction to historical development. The community begins in sensible appearance and then generates doctrine. The generation of doctrine is in fact the sign that the community has formed. The community starts out with talk about

objects in the world and only subsequently arrives at forms of speech about eternal truth. In logic, things happen the other way round. The idea comes first, and only subsequently produces difference. We might say that temporal order of the Gospels (first the synoptic accounts of a worldly life, and only subsequently the Johannine account of eternal life) is reversed in the creed (first the creator and only subsequently the sensible world). Hegel's logic follows the logic of the creed, of doctrine, of the community's talk of God. One can see from this just how Johannine Hegel's philosophy is, compared with some of his theological contemporaries. The various attempts by university professors to shore up the truth of Christianity by appeal to historical evidence follow the logic of Mark's Gospel, which starts and ends with the sensible presence of Jesus of Nazareth. Hegel's thinking follows the logic of John's Gospel, which starts with *Logos* and where only subsequently is the world created, into which the *Logos* comes.

The logic of the spirit is discerned in changes in the community's talk about God. Indeed, one can identify such a community only after its talk has changed – after it produces “doctrine” in Hegel's words. Before there is a community, in Hegel's sense, there is talk about Jesus Christ, and a concern with the sensible presence of Jesus in the thick of things – teaching, healing, eating, etc. As this talk transforms into doctrine, and as it starts to deal in such non-sensible concerns such as eternal life, faith, truth, etc. the community starts to form. Only when one identifies doctrines can one identify the community. The production of doctrine is the generation of the community. Hegel puts it starkly. First: “Christ lived in Palestine.” Subsequently: “this man was the Son of God” (*LPR* 3:226-227; *VPR* 3:266). It is in this context that Hegel insists that appeals to miracles cannot function as warrants for belief. Miracles are “Palestinian,” one might say.

The crucial thing is the change in the community's talk about God, and Hegel offers many examples of cases where contemporary theology fails to take account of this change, and indeed undermines it, by talking about miracles, religious experience, history, or whatever. These are cases of sensible presence, and are marks of forms of speech that precede the formation of the community. We might say that wherever one encounters the quest for the historical Jesus there is a sign that the community of believers has yet to be formed. The change in talk is signaled by a switch to concepts that are not rooted in or reducible to sensible presence: “Son of God,” “eternal life,” “indwelling spirit,” “all truth.” (Again, these are emphatically Johannine topics.)

This transition is what is named the outpouring of the spirit, which could only come on the scene after the Christ become flesh had been carried	Dieser Übergang ist es, was die Ausgießung des Geistes genannt ist, die nur eintreten konnte, nachdem der fleischgewordene Christus
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off, after the sensible immediate presence had come to an end; then the spirit for the first time comes forth. It is other, another form, that it has, and only the spirit produces it. (LPR 3:230)

entrückt ist, nachdem die sinnliche unmittelbare Gegenwart aufgehört hat; da kommt erst der Geist hervor. Es ist anderes, eine andere Form, die das hat, was nur der Geist produziert. (VPR 3:271)

Hegel attempts to draw out the significance of John 16:7. “Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you” (KJV). In John’s Gospel it is famously rather vague what the spirit will do. “He will guide you into all truth” (John 16:13). It is not obvious what this means. Hegel’s *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* are an attempt to discern the logic at work in Christian talk about being led into all truth, and to commend that logic in the face of defective logics that undermine the truth into which one seeks to be led. The sign that the community is being led into all truth is that its talk changes from a concern with sensible presence to a concern with this “other,” this “other form.”

There are many candidates for this “other form,” but what they will all share is that they are not concerned with sensible presence. Hegel’s favorites are all Johannine: “life,” “love,” “truth.” It may seem slightly odd to claim that things like life, love, and truth are not concerned with tangible things in the world. Surely they are utterly tangible! The point is that in doctrine these terms are all qualified: *eternal* life, *divine* love, *all* truth, and so forth. It is the logic that underlies these qualifications that Hegel seeks to draw out. Each qualifier can qualify each term: they are fully convertible. (Their convertibility may be a sign that one is not dealing with tangible objects.)

The shift to doctrinal talk is a shift away from empirical talk, just as the gift of the spirit is given as Christ’s sensible presence is withdrawn. Any theologian who is endlessly pestered by students asking what relevance doctrine has for everyday life has a friend in Hegel. It is not that one should not be concerned with everyday life. Quite the opposite: it is all for the sake of everyday life. It is that the problems with everyday life (problems which, in theology, are concentrated into the extraordinary word “sin”) are so deep that they cannot be properly addressed if one follows everyday logics, or even specialized modern logics like those of Descartes and Kant. (I am reminded of Adorno’s joke: people ask what meaning Hegel has for the present, but the real question is what meaning the present has in the light of Hegel.) The community’s attempts to confess sin, be forgiven, and share the peace are obstructed when they are guided by logics that remain mired in false oppositions, above all the false opposition of divine and human action. It is only by knowing that human action is also in some indefinite way divine action, that one has the resources – and the imagination – to see

problems differently, and to combat the evil they produce in the world. For Hegel this is not only genuine knowledge but is, in the end, the only *true* knowledge. Human action “is” divine action in the same sense, as we have already discussed, that believing “is” also knowing. Errant logics obstruct theology. Hegel’s *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* are the pursuit of the repair of errant logics, in the service of theology. The sources of the repair of logic are Christian doctrines, supremely the doctrine of the Trinity, whose first adumbrations are to be discerned in John’s Gospel.

What does it mean to overcome the false opposition between divine and human action? Hegel says that what is first posited objectively is subsequently posited subjectively. That form of words is too concentrated to be readily meaningful. Hegel’s expanded account is his language of the three “elements” in the concrete representation. He summarizes them as follows:

- First, spirit knows God as *esse* (*Wesen*) and *actus* (*Tat*): in sum as “living” (*lebendig*)
- Second, spirit knows God as objective (*gegenständlich*), as otherness (*Anderssein*), as difference (*Unterschied*), as finitude (*Endlichkeit*): in sum, as the “Son of God”
- Third, spirit knows itself as the unity of the first two, is objective for itself, objectifies itself as the unity of the first two: in sum otherness is sublated (*aufgehoben*) in “eternal love” (*LPR* 3:230; *VPR* 3:271–272).

It is important to remember that in offering this account Hegel is not primarily doing theology: he is engaged in displaying the logic of Christian talk about God as Trinity. The enumerations (“first,” “second,” “third”) are enumerations of logical steps, not events in the inner life of God or anything like that. Hegel is investigating Christian talk about God as Trinity; he is not himself talking about God. The logic that Hegel discerns is one in which there is pure activity, followed by separation, followed by unification. Hegel does not mean that God is first of all pure activity, and then God goes on a holiday of separation, and finally God returns home, and turns the key in the lock, in unity. Hegel means that in Christian talk of God as Trinity there is talk of pure activity, talk of separation, and talk of unity, and that this talk is guided by a logic that can, with some care, be investigated and identified.

Hegel makes it abundantly clear that he is interested in the logic, and not anything else. He is not even interested in the history of this talk, or in the particularities of how it came about:

The empirical way in which [it] has happened does not here concern us. The fervors etc. of bishops at	Auf welche empirische Weise [es] geschehen ist, geht uns hierbei nichts an. Da kann von Leidenschaften usf.
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councils can be rehearsed. That is futile. What is the content in and for itself? Through philosophy alone can this simple present content be justified, not through history. What spirit does is no history. It has to do only with what is in and for itself, not past, but simply present. This is the origin of the community. (LPR 3:232–233)

der Bischöfe auf Konzilien erzählt werden. Das ist nichtig. Was ist der Inhalt an und für sich? Durch die Philosophie allein kann sich dieser schlechthin präsente Inhalt rechtfertigen, nicht durch Geschichte; was der Geist tut, ist keine Historie; es ist ihm nur darum zu tun, was an und für sich ist, nicht Vergangenes, sondern schlechthin Präsentes. – Das ist das Entstehen der Gemeinde. (VPR 3:275)

An interest in the logic displayed in doctrines is indifferent to how those doctrines came about. Who cares about conciliar debates? It is how they stand now that counts. Historical reconstruction cannot serve as a warrant for the claims expressed in doctrines. Spirit does not study history. It concerns itself with the kind of life in which the distinction between its own subjectivity and the objectivity it faces is preserved but related in the most intimate way. It is not viewed as a sequence of events, in time, but in its logical expression it is “de-tensed” (O’Regan) or “unrhythmed” (Cooper) or “atemporalized.” Logic, for Hegel, is out of time. The “origin” of the community is not a point in time, or rather it is exactly only a *point*, in the strict sense that it has no duration.

Hegel does not substantially alter the structure of his concluding remarks compared with 1821, although he tones down the criticism of philosophy and theology somewhat. Of much greater interest is a lucid description of the relation between *Vorstellung* and *Begriff*, and the implication this has for the relation of philosophy to the Church:

[Philosophy] seems to be opposed to the Church; it shares with cultural formation and with reflection the fact that it does not remain with the form of representation, in that it grasps with concepts. Rather it [leaves it behind] to apprehend in thinking, but through that it recognizes the form of representation as necessary. But the concept is higher because it has its

... der Kirche scheint [Philosophie] entgegen zu sein, und das hat sie mit der Bildung, mit der Reflexion gemein, daß, indem sie begreift, sie bei der Form der Vorstellung nicht stehenbleibt, sondern [dazu fortgeht], im Gedanken zu begreifen, aber daraus auch die Form der Vorstellung als notwendig zu erkennen. Aber der Begriff ist das Höhere, daß er seinen eigenen Inhalt

own content at the same time as it includes, and does justice to, the various forms. This opposition is for that reason merely formal. (LPR 3:246)

hat, auch die unterschiedenen Formen faßt und ihnen Gerechtigkeit widerfahren läßt. Indes, dieser Gegensatz ist nur formell. (VPR 3:296)

The Church is concerned with representation. This is not a slight on the Church, but an acknowledgment that the Church is a community of everyday folk, and – as Hegel says repeatedly – everyday folk quite properly think through representation. By contrast the more restricted practices of *Bildung* (the higher forms of educational formation that are not generally available to everyday folk) and of “reflection” (the specialized practices of philosophical investigation) deal in conceptual forms of thinking. Crucially, at the same time as it grasps conceptually it acknowledges that representation is a condition for its own conceptual activity. Representation is not merely a mode of thinking different from conceptualization: it is “necessary” to it. Nonetheless, there is a hierarchy in these different forms. The concept is higher in this hierarchy, for two reasons. First, it has its own content, which is to say it is generative and not merely observatory. Second it contains the representational forms. There is a sense in which representation is part of, and is included in, conceptual thinking. By including it, it gives representation its due. Because conceptual thinking shows this respect to representation, philosophy is not really opposed to the Church, it just thinks in a more specialized way. It should be quite clear from this that philosophy is not in competition with the Church; neither is it a substitute for the kinds of thinking displayed in the Church. Rather, the thinking that the Church does is *also* the thinking that philosophy does, although philosophy *does more*. This “doing more” has a variety of forms. The one named here is its capacity to produce – and not merely re-produce – its content. This generativity has something to do with the relation of objectivity to subjectivity. The thinking of the Church is one in which divine action is represented as over and against human action. As Hegel tries to show in the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, the thinking of philosophy is one in which thinking overcomes the false opposition between divine and human action.

The 1827 Lectures

The structure of the 1827 lectures is broadly similar to that of the 1824 series. The discussion of the “third element,” the community, begins with a familiar opposition, which is left over (so to speak) from the second element:

an opposition between the objectivity of “truth” and the subjectivity of the one who has “faith.”

The community are the single empirical subjects, who are in the spirit of God, from whom however this content, this history, the truth simultaneously is distinguished and which stands over and against them. (LPR 3:329)

Die Gemeinde sind die einzelnen empirischen Subjekte, die im Geiste Gottes sind, von denen aber dieser Inhalt, diese Geschichte, die Wahrheit zugleich unterschieden ist und ihnen gegenübersteht. (VPR 3:194)

The community is made up of individuals who participate in God’s life, but Christian talk about this life is such that this life is distinguished from those individuals and is taken to be something external to them. The discussion of the community will be a discussion of the kind of logic, displayed in Christian talk about the spirit, in which this false opposition is overcome, in which the truth is something that the community fully participates in. The story of Jesus Christ is recounted as a narrative in which agency resides in this individual; those in the community must discover their own utter involvement in this agency.

It was discussed above that the human subject – the one in whom it is revealed that the certainty of reconciliation is for humanity through the spirit – has been signified as single, exclusive and distinct from others. Thus the display of divine history for the other subjects is one that is objective for them, and they now have to progress through this history, this process, in themselves. (LPR 3:329)

Es ist oben dargelegt worden, daß das menschliche Subjekte – der Mensch, an dem das geoffenbart wird, was durch den Geist für den Menschen Gewißheit der Versöhnung ist –, als Einzelnes, Ausschließendes, von anderen Verschiedenes ist bezeichnet worden. So ist die Darstellung der göttlichen Geschichte für die anderen Subjekte eine für sie objektive, und sie haben nun an ihnen selbst diese Geschichte, diesen Prozeß zu durchlaufen. (VPR 3:195)

Talk about the spirit changes the “subject.” Hegel might be taken to mean that there is a transfer of subjectivity from Jesus Christ to the community, and that what is lost to the one is gained by the other. This would be an odd claim to make, however, given the continuing centrality of Jesus Christ for the community, and the corresponding continuing centrality of Christology for theology, neither of which Hegel denies. It is more plausible to suppose

that Hegel means instead that there is an expansion of subjectivity, and that what is initially restricted becomes – as talk of the spirit develops – in principle unlimited and shared by all. Hegel does not make use of the Pauline trope of the body of Christ, perhaps because its focus on the second person of the Trinity does not neatly enough fit his enumeration of the three “elements,” and his desire to identify the third element as the point at which subjectivity is radically extended. But the logic of Paul’s talk of the body of Christ as the community’s participation in God’s life is exactly the logic that Hegel is describing: a radical explosion of agency from the single body to the infinitely dispersed body – infinitely dispersed across space (many bodies) and time (many generations). This interpretation of Hegel’s remarks about subjectivity avoids any sense that the community is competing with Jesus Christ for agency.

Hegel’s discussion of the origin of the community identifies the question of warrants for belief as the central concern. This was also a feature of the 1824 lectures, but in the 1827 series it takes center stage without much preamble. Hegel calls warrants for belief “authentication” (*Beglaubigung*). As before, Hegel insists that this task cannot be discharged by the community through appeal to external or sensible grounds, but must be “spiritual” (*geistig*). Again, any attempt to interpret Hegel’s clarification that is guided by the rules of Cartesian or Kantian logics will run aground at this point, because Hegel discerns in Christian speech about the spirit a non-Cartesian and non-Kantian logic in which questions of warrants are inseparable from the way in which truth is “produced,” and not simply “represented.” The logic of Christian talk about the spirit is one in which truth is generated by spirit, for spirit, rather than being something over and against the thinking subject.

We are free, of course, to reject this as nonsense, and to insist that “of course” truth can only ever be represented, and that to say truth is “produced” makes no sense. There is nothing in Hegel’s argument to prevent us saying this: Hegel would point out that this is a sign that our thinking is guided by a logic that is quite different from the logic that he discerns in Christian talk about the Trinity. A non-Christian philosopher who rejects Hegel’s account is thus in a somewhat different position from a Christian philosopher. Why would a non-Christian philosopher *want* to adopt a non-Cartesian or non-Kantian logic? A Christian philosopher who rejects Hegel’s account, however, has to pose a profound question to him- or herself that does not so urgently confront the non-Christian philosopher. “What are my reasons for rejecting a logic that Hegel tells me is displayed in Christian talk about the Trinity?” If the answer to this is “Hegel’s claim that such a logic is displayed there is not persuasive,” then this concludes the investigation, and Hegel ceases to be worth reading. If the answer to this is “Hegel’s claims make no sense,” then this is a sign that the Christian

philosopher's thinking is in the thrall of a Cartesian or Kantian (or other modern) logic. Such a philosopher might simply give up: but a curious thinker should persist in the investigation until Hegel becomes intelligible, which means until the philosopher has grasped the alternative logic in play. At this point a judgment can be made about whether this logic is indeed discerned in Christian talk about the Trinity, or whether Hegel just makes it up. The goal of this study is to help the reader get to this point, and to provide enough help with Hegel's unfamiliar idioms to enable this judgment to be made.

It is against the background of considerations like this that we can confront Hegel's extraordinarily prescient comment about how to read scripture:

It is said that one has to read the holy scriptures like profane authors. One can do that in questions that concern merely the historical, finite and external. But the rest is understanding with spirit; whatever is profane is not the authentication of spirit. (LPR 3:331)

Man sagt, man müsse die heiligen Schriften behandeln wie profane Autoren. Das kann man tun, was das bloß Geschichtliche Endliche, Äußerliche betrifft. Das andere aber ist das Auffassen mit dem Geiste; jenes Profane ist nicht die Beglaubigung des Geistes. (VPR 3:196)

Some say that we should read scripture like any other book (a view implicit in Spinoza's *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* of 1670, made explicit by Toland in *Christianity Not Mysterious* of 1696, and repeated – much more influentially, and showing how mainstream the view was becoming – by Jowett, a trained classicist, in *Essays and Reviews* of 1860). That is entirely appropriate, Hegel says, if one is concerned exclusively with questions of history – with what later generations will naïvely call “the facts.” But if one is concerned with anything else, then one's reading of scripture will be reading “with” the spirit. Hegel's language is provocatively participative and companionable here. The kinds of warrants for belief that proceed from spirit are not concerned with the merely profane.

This claim remains shocking in the twenty-first century, nearly two hundred years after Hegel uttered it in Berlin. Biblical studies was not yet quite so colonized with the errant logics, riven with the false oppositions, that would mark it from the mid-nineteenth century onwards, into our own time. Oppositions between “myth” and “history,” “scientific” and “traditional,” “supernatural” and “natural” would become firmly established by Strauss in *The Life of Jesus Critically Examined* (1835) and would remain operative in

biblical studies thereafter.²⁰ In the twentieth century some extra oppositions would be added for good measure: between “academic” and “confessional,” “objective” and “fundamentalist,” “insider” and “outsider,” and so forth.

Hegel’s claim is radical. If one wishes to read scripture in search of “facts” then one will read it like any other book, and quite rightly. How else would one excavate a text (whether scriptural or not) except by using the best available critical tools? Hegel is not against this pursuit: it is exactly the right pursuit for folk after facts. However, *this pursuit has nothing at all to do with warrants for belief*. In other words, if one is concerned with the truth that lies at the heart of the Christian faith, one will be concerned with something quite different from “facts.” At this point a certain kind of reader (including, perhaps, some believing biblical scholars) will think that Hegel is not just bonkers, but dangerous, and his claims will provoke not just puzzlement but anger. It is thus worth gaining a measure of clarity about what exactly Hegel is saying.

Hegel is saying that a certain class of question (quite apart from the answers one might give) is generated by errant logics. Questions in this class include: “was there really a virgin birth?”, “did the resurrection really happen?”, “did the Apostles really speak in tongues at Pentecost?”. These are different from questions in another class, which might initially look similar, but which are innocuous in Hegel’s view: “did Caesar Augustus decree that all the world should be taxed?”, “was there an empty tomb?”, “what languages did the Apostles speak?”. The questions in this latter class are what Hegel calls “historical, finite and external.” They invite certain kinds of textual investigation, and generate conclusions with varying degrees of probability. Questions in the first class are questions of faith. Whatever investigations they might invite, these will not be historical. It is not just that scholars will not be able to decide them, it is that scholars will not be able even to get started on them. The word that signals that there is an errant logic at work in generating these questions is the word “really.” The word “really” belongs in questions of fact. But these are questions of faith.

Hegel does have an answer for those who want to know “what, then, count as warrants for belief?”, but this answer is not very helpful, from the perspective of those who ask it. His answer is: if you want to investigate warrants for belief, rather than historical facts, you need to learn a different logic. This logic is displayed in the thinking of the earliest Christian communities when they began to “change the subject,” and speak of the action of the spirit and not only the action of Jesus Christ.

²⁰ See Nicholas Adams, “The Bible,” in Nicholas Adams, George Pattison, and Graham Ward (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Theology and Modern European Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 551ff.

Hegel has no answer (or at least no plain answer in support of which textual evidence can be marshaled) to those who want to know “but are there any other available logics, because yours is frankly bonkers?” This is because while Hegel is immensely generative and imaginative when it comes to identifying errant logics beset with false oppositions, he only considers the merits of his own repairs, and does not invite his reader to weigh alternatives. This does not much matter: if Hegel causes the kind of trouble for his reader that provokes inquiries into alternative logics – not only alternative to Cartesian and Kantian logics, but alternative to his own – then he has arguably performed an even more valuable service than the one he sets out to perform, namely, to persuade his reader to adopt his own “Trinitarian” logic. The bigger obstacle, I suspect, is that Hegel’s claims will provoke no inquiries at all, because his claims seem not to make sense.

Our troubles are not over if one accepts all this, and finds it persuasive. They have just begun. But at least they are the right kind of troubles, from Hegel’s point of view. What count as warrants for belief? This question has not been magically made to disappear when one invites the one who asks it to learn a different logic. Suppose I agree to learn it. What then? Hegel outlines the contours of this alternative logic, and we have had ample opportunity to discern them. It is a logic in which the false oppositions between “divine” and “human” action, between “faith” and “knowledge,” between “production” and “representation” are overcome. Once one follows this logic, Hegel says, one is in a position to acknowledge that one’s agency is a matter of participating in God’s agency, that truth is something that is produced by and for the community, that love is a matter of recognizing one’s own authentic identity in the other, who remains genuinely other, but who is not a competitor. In its broadest outlines, it is a logic in which humanity and God are not locked in a struggle for agency, in which groups of people are not locked in competition for identity, and so forth.

This all sounds lovely. But what about those warrants for belief? Hegel insists consistently across each series of lectures that this is a matter of “the witness of spirit.” What this means is elaborated as follows.

Thus the community itself is the existing spirit, the spirit in its existence, God existing as community. (*LPR* 3:331)

So ist die Gemeinde selbst der existierende Geist, der Geist in seiner Existenz, Gott als Gemeinde existierend. (*VPR* 3:198)

We are dealing with a text that Hegel did not publish (or even “write”), and so one needs to be circumspect about such things as pagination and paragraph breaks. But all the same, this is a strong candidate for the shortest and also most misunderstood paragraph in the *Lectures*. It contains one of

the strongest evidences for an eclipse of grace: the phrase “God existing as community” seems pretty conclusive proof that the distinction between God and humanity has been abolished. The community *is* God. But Hegel does not quite say that. And this “not quite” shows up in two ways. First, it is not “is” but “as.” Second, it is the other way round: God existing as community, not community as God. There are four terms in play in this extraordinary paragraph: community, existing, spirit, God. These terms seem convertible, at least to an extent. “Existing” is predicated of spirit and community (and is predicated of spirit twice); spirit is predicated of God; community is predicated of God; God is not predicated of anything.

We are dealing with predication, of some kind. It is predication governed by a logic in which there is no strong binary opposition between spirit and community or between God and community. The relation between God and spirit does not show up in this paragraph as a significant problem, and from this we can infer that whatever errant logics are in Hegel’s sights, he discerns no problem about the relation of God and spirit in theology. (It is accounted for in the next paragraph, and for reasons of space – and because it contains nothing obviously contentious – we can pass over it. Its claims, like those considered here, concern logical not doctrinal claims.) The false opposition between spirit and community, and thus between God and community, is overcome in a logic in which spirit is a predicate of community, and community is a predicate of God. It is vital to observe that it is *not* a logic in which God is a predicate. The logic is not reversible: it has a single directionality. There is also the interesting difference between “is” and “as.” The community “is” spirit; God “as” community. Hegel’s logic seems to permit a difference in predication in respect of the terms “spirit” and “God,” although this difference is not spelled out. Put more directly: had Hegel said, “God is the existing community” or, worse, “the existing community is God” there would be trouble. (There may already be trouble, but the trouble would be much, much more serious.) Hegel would not only have produced a logic in which the false opposition between God and humanity is overcome: he would have produced rules for predication in which the distinction between them is not only in danger, but is abolished. The distinction may well be in danger nonetheless. Hegel clearly thinks that the benefits furnished by this logic outweigh the risks.

I have deliberately cast Hegel’s claims in terms of predication, of logic, rather than in terms of theological claims. This is because I do not think Hegel is doing theology. I may be wrong about this, but if so then I aim to be consistently wrong. In other words, I am avoiding asking the question “is there more to the spirit than community?”. This question (a very good question) is a way of asking about the relation of the Trinity *ad intra* and the Trinity *ad extra*. Such questions are quite proper to theology. But Hegel does

not ask them. Hegel is asking about the logic which governs predication, and is offering a logic in which certain false oppositions are overcome. Why is the opposition between spirit and community (or between God and community) a *false* opposition, for Hegel, rather than a perfectly respectable opposition? Because Hegel discerns in Christian talk about the Trinity a strong tendency (indeed an utter commitment) to the participation of human action in divine action, of human life in divine life, of human love in divine love. An *opposition* of spirit to community is indicative of a governing logic which obstructs thinking about and thus articulating such participation. Hegel is just not asking about whether talk about the spirit is reducible, without remainder, to talk about the community. That question is not a logical question at all.

We have made a start on the question about warrants for belief. So far we have before us a logic in which the false opposition between spirit and community is overcome. It remains to be discovered what more can be said about the witness of spirit. More certainly remains to be said, because we have not touched the question of warrants. Hegel does address this question, and this is signaled in his discussion by the presence of “truth.” Hegel runs through the ways in which the logic governs truth three times, once for each of the “elements.” As we are interested in the question of warrants for belief, these need to be rehearsed.

First:

It [sc. the community] begins with truth present to hand, is known, present-to-hand truth. And this truth is what God is: he is the triune, the life, is this process of his being in himself, this determination of his being in himself. (LPR 3:331)²¹

Sie fängt damit an, daß die Wahrheit vorhanden ist, gewußte, vorhandene Wahrheit ist. Und diese Wahrheit ist, was Gott ist, daß er der Dreieinige, daß er das Leben, dieser Prozeß seiner in sich ist, das Bestimmen seiner in sich. (VPR 3:198)

Everything here is governed by “the community begins,” and describes the logic exemplified in the community’s talk of God, in this case God the Father. Hegel describes this logic as governing talk about God without reference to anything outside God. It governs predication, and includes the terms “triune,” “life,” “process of his being in himself,” “determination of his being in himself.”

²¹ My translation of *seiner* as “his being” is rather awkward; it is intended to get at the difference from *in sich*.

Second:

The second side of this truth is then that this has also appeared, has relation to the subject, is for the subject, and that the subject thereby has essential relation and should be a citizen of the kingdom of God. Affirming that the subject itself should become a child of God includes affirming the idea that reconciliation in and for itself is finished in the divine idea and that secondly, then, it has also appeared and therefore that the truth is certain for humankind. The appearing just is the certain, the idea as it comes in the manner of appearing to consciousness. (*LPR* 3:331)

Die zweiter Seite dieser Wahrheit ist dann, daß dies auch erschienen ist, Beziehung auf das Subjekt hat, für das Subjekt ist, und daß das Subjekt wesetlich Beziehung darauf hat und Bürger des Reiches Gottes sein soll. Dies, daß das Subjekt selbst ein Kind Gottes werden soll, enthält, daß die Versöhnung an und für sich vollbracht ist in der göttlichen Idee und daß sie dann auch zweitens erschienen und also die Wahrheit den Menschen gewiß ist. Eben das Gewißen ist die Erscheinung, die Idee, wie sie in der Weise des Erschienenens an das Bewußtsein kommt. (*VPR* 3:198–199)

Everything here is governed by truth as it is articulated by the community, not truth in some abstract sense. It describes the logic exemplified in the community's talk of truth in relation to the Son of God. This logic has an implied third party, because the truth "appears." To appear implies something for it to appear *to*. Who this third party is remains vague. A new term (a second party, so to speak) comes into play: subject. It comes into play in relation (in multiple senses of "relation") to "truth." The logic which governs the relation of "truth" to "subject" operates via the prepositions "to" and "for," and via a noun: "relation." Some substantial predication then follows: "citizen of the kingdom of God" and "child of God." The logic thus distinguishes two terms: "truth" and "subject," and simultaneously relates them to each other in a variety of ways. They are not falsely opposed to each other, but are distinct-and-in-relation. Echoing the last word uttered by Jesus on the cross in John's Gospel in Luther's translation, reconciliation is "finished" in the divine idea. The qualification "in and for itself" is the familiar technical Hegelian way of signaling that the false opposition between subject and object has been overcome. Presumably the two terms whose false opposition is ruled out are "Father" and "Son." It is tempting to ask a theological question: "who is the reconciliation between?". Hegel shows no interest in this question. He is exclusively concerned with the logic governing talk about reconciliation. That logic governs two claims about reconciliation: first that it is complete "in" the divine idea and second that it appears "to" people. At this point a new term is introduced: humanity;

and the crucial logical move is made: truth is certain for humanity. Up until this point the logic governed the relation between truth and the subject. Now, however, it governs the relation between truth and humanity. The same logic which governs the appearance of truth “to” and “for” the subject governs the appearance of truth “to” and “for” humanity. The logic which governs the appearing of truth to humanity requires, as a necessary condition, the reconciliation “finished” by the child of God *in* the divine idea. Less formally, there is no *appearance* of truth without Jesus Christ. The final term operative in this logic is “certain.” The logic which governs the appearance of truth to humanity also governs the quality this truth has: it is certain. Again, it is important to note that this certainty qualifies how the community sees truth. Hegel is not claiming that the truth is certain. That would be a first-order claim. He is reporting that the community takes the truth to be certain, and that the logic that governs the community’s claims about the truth, is of a particular kind. In sum: the truth appears; the truth is “to,” “for,” and “relation” with respect to “the subject.” The logic which governs this relation implies that the relation is “essential” (and not merely contingent). The logic which governs the claim that the subject is the child of God also implies (1) that reconciliation is “finished” in the divine idea and (2) that the truth appears to humanity. The logic which governs speech about truth appearing to humanity also implies the claim (3) that the truth is certain.

I said that it remains vague who the third party is – who it is that truth appears to. This is because I want to avoid attributing to Hegel to the view that the Father appears to the Son, or that the Son appears to the Father. We should be strenuously agnostic about whether Hegel holds these views, but more importantly, his logical investigation does not include any interest in this question.

It should be clear by now that treating Hegel’s claims as claims about the logic of Christian speech about God as Trinity produces a rather different kind of discussion from what would take place if one were to treat Hegel’s claims as contributions to Trinitarian doctrine. Those who teach this text to graduate students can readily affirm that students tend to pose doctrinal rather than logical questions to Hegel’s text. I hope to show that a radical rethink is required before one can make sense of the language (especially words like “subject”) that otherwise just looks eccentric and sometimes just plain weird. Incidentally, when Barth reinterprets the doctrine of the Trinity, and tries his hand at Hegelian terms – as when he says that there are three *Seinsweisen* in one *Subjekt* – this is in my view a most unfortunate development.²² I take it as a sign that Barth (a) thinks Hegel is speaking

²² Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* (ed. G. Bromiley and T. Torrance, Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1975), 1.1, §9, p. 348.

about the Trinity and (b) offers a model to be emulated. But Hegel is speaking about the logic of Christian speech about the Trinity, not about the Trinity. If he were to speak directly about the Trinity, which by and large he does not in my reading, I suspect he would say there are three *Personen* in one *Wesen*. Barth's use of logical terms not to clarify the rules governing the use of doctrinal tropes but actually to substitute for the doctrinal tropes themselves seems a bit garbled to me, and best avoided. Those who seek to defend or clarify Barth's use of these terms are, in my view, in real trouble, and risk making matters even worse.

Third:

The third side is the relation of the subject to this truth. The subject, insofar as it is in relationship to it, comes to this very conscious unity, finds itself worthy of this known unity, and generates it [sc. unity] in itself and is satisfied by the divine spirit. (LPR 3:331–332)

Die dritte Seite ist das Verhältnis des Subjekts zu dieser Wahrheit, daß das Subjekt, sofern es im Verhältnis zu ihr ist, eben zu dieser bewußten Einheit kommt, sich dieser gewußten Einheit würdigt, sie in sich hervorbringt und vom göttlichen Geist erfüllt wird. (VPR 3:199)

It goes without saying that this paragraph concerns the community's speech about truth, in this case in its talk about the spirit. It also goes without saying that Hegel is trying to articulate the logic that governs this talk. The logical analysis is cumulative: the previous terms (subject, truth) are handled once again, with the addition of new terms. The first new term is relationship (*Verhältnis*), which is different from the relation (*Beziehung*) of the previous section. The logic that governs the "relationship" is one which entails "unity" (*Einheit*), where this unity is "conscious." In other words, the two terms truth and subject are (a) taken to be a unity and (b) taken so *consciously*. Again, Hegel is not asking whether the spirit comes to a conscious unity or whatever. He is inquiring into the logic that governs Christian claims about the unity of the Trinity, as this is expressed in talk about the spirit. The grammar of this complex "third side" (which is all one sentence in the German) is noteworthy. All the work is done by the subordinate clause which begins *daß das Subjekt*, which then governs "is in relationship," "comes to this conscious unity," "finds itself worthy of this known unity," "generates the unity in itself," and "is satisfied (or completed, or fulfilled) by the divine spirit." The logic which governs claims about conscious unity (and for the first time consciousness is now explicitly in the frame) also implies a self-consciousness ("finding itself worthy"), and also a generativity (it brings the unity about *in itself*), and also a completeness. In other words, when Christians talk of the spirit, their talk is governed by a logic in which explicitness (signaled by "conscious") is inseparable from

evaluation, generativity, and fulfillment. One might say that, for Hegel, whereas divine action is apportioned across all three persons, it is in talk about the spirit that *thinking* explicitly enters the frame.

We thus have some important building blocks in our understanding of what Hegel means by “witness of the spirit.” There is explicitness (which at least bears some promising relationship to warrants for belief); there is also involvement in God’s life that is accompanied by a kind of evaluation (also promising for warrants for belief).

On we go.

That the single subject is now satisfied by the divine Spirit happens through mediation in it [sc. the subject] itself, and the mediation is that it has this faith. For faith is truth, the presupposition that in and for itself certainly reconciliation is finished. Only through the medium of this faith that reconciliation is accomplished in and for itself and with certainty is the subject able to posit, and capable of positing, itself in this unity. This mediation is absolutely necessary. (*LPR* 3:332)

Daß nun das einzelne Subjekt vom göttlichen Geist erfüllt wird, geschieht durch Vermittlung an ihm selbst, und die Vermittlung ist, daß es diesen Glauben hat. Denn der Glaube ist die Wahrheit, die Voraussetzung, daß an und für sich gewiß die Versöhnung vollbracht ist. Nur vermittels dieses Glaubens, daß die Versöhnung an und für sich und gewiß vollbracht sei, ist das Subjekt fähig und im Stande, sich selbst in diese Einheit zu setzen. Diese Vermittlung ist absolut notwendig. (*VPR* 3:203)

Mediation is the next crucial term in the logic that governs Christian talk of the spirit. The term “subject” is undergoing some change. The first time “the subject” appeared was in the analysis of the logic that governs Christian talk about the Son of God. In talk of the spirit, this subject is satisfied (or fulfilled) by the spirit. Talk of that satisfaction is now governed by mediation in the subject. Talk of the subject’s satisfaction is bound up with talk of the subject’s faith. Talk of faith is governed by a logic in which truth is predicated of faith. Christian talk of faith and truth is governed by a logic which assigns the status of a “presupposition” to the claim about reconciliation. This is a crucial move. Obviously there is no Christian speech about “presuppositions” in the doctrine of the Trinity. The Nicene Creed does not include the word “presupposition.” This is Hegel’s description of what the logic that governs this speech is doing. The logical status of the claim about reconciliation is one of presupposition (rather than argument or inference). Christians do not arrive at the claim about reconciliation through a process of reasoning. The claim about reconciliation is already operative

before any thinking gets under way. This seems scripturally sound: Christ's words "It is finished" are not the conclusion of a syllogism. They are the point of departure for Christian talk. As these words mark the end of one kind of life (in Hegel's terms, the "sensible appearance") and the beginning of another ("the origin of the community") that makes sense. Hegel then makes the final move in this paragraph: the faith in the reconciliation is a logical precondition for the subject positing itself in this unity. In other words, when Christians talk about the unity of the Trinity, speech about the unity requires speech about faith in the certainty of reconciliation. The logic that governs this speech is such that *there is no talk of unity without talk of reconciliation*. There is also no talk of reconciliation without talk of its certainty – which Hegel clarifies by classing it logically as a presupposition. Hegel's articulation of the logic at work in Trinitarian speech is very interesting at this point: for Hegel there is no talk of God as triune and then, by happy accident, also talk about the death of Jesus Christ "finishing" the reconciliation of God and the world. There is only talk of God as triune *because* there is also talk of reconciliation. It is not entirely clear what motivates Hegel's analysis at this point, but one thing is clear: any theologian who waxes lyrical about the triune nature of God in a way that is not tied to an account of the crucifixion has in Hegel's view failed to grasp the logic of Christian speech about the spirit.

In this blessedness mediated through grasping the truth, the difficulty that is immediately involved in the grasping is sublated, namely, [the difficulty that] the relationship of the community to this idea is a relationship of the single, particular subject. This difficulty is abolished in the truth itself. It consists in the subject being different from absolute spirit. This difference is abolished, and this lies in God's looking into the human heart, the substantial will, the innermost, all-embracing subjectivity of the human person, the inner, true, earnest willing. Apart from this inner will, distinct from this inner substantial essentiality, there is still the human externality, its deficiency that leads

In dieser Beseligung vermittelt dieses Ergreifens der Wahrheit ist die Schwierigkeit aufgehoben, die unmittelbar darin liegt, daß das Verhältnis der Gemeinde zu dieser Idee ein Verhältnis der einzelnen besonderen Subjekte ist. Diese Schwierigkeit ist in dieser Wahrheit selbst gehoben. Sie besteht darin, daß das Subjekt verschieden ist von dem absoluten Geiste. Dies ist gehoben, und daß es gehoben ist, liegt darin, daß Gott das Herz des Menschen ansieht, den substantiellen Willen, die innerste, alles befassende Subjektivität des Menschen, das innere, wahre, ernstliche Wollen. Außer diesem inneren Wollen, verschieden von dieser innerlichen, substantiellen Wirklichkeit ist am

to it making mistakes. It can exist in a way that is not appropriate to this inward, substantial essentiality, this substantial, essential inwardness. The difficulty is abolished by God looking into the heart and looking upon the substantial, so that externality, otherness, finitude in general, imperfection, or however else it is determined, does not intrude into the absolute unity. The finite is lowered to an inessentiality, and is known as the inessential. For in the idea, the otherness of the Son is a transient, disappearing – and not a true, essentially persistent, absolute – moment. (*LPR* 3:332)

Menschen noch sein Äußerliches, seine Mangelhaftigkeit, daß er Fehler begehen, daß er auf eine Weise existieren kann, die dieser innerlichen substantiellen Wesentlichkeit, dieser substantiellen wesentlichen Innerlichkeit nicht angemessen ist. Diese Schwierigkeit ist dadurch gehoben, daß Gott das Herz ansieht, auf das Substantielle sieht, so daß die Äußerlichkeit, das Anderssein, überhaupt die Endlichkeit, Unvollkommenheit, und wie sie sich weiter bestimmt, dennoch der absoluten Einheit keinen Eintrag tun – daß das Endliche zu einen Unwesentlichen herabgesetzt ist und als das Unwesentliche gewußt wird. Denn in der Idee ist das Anderssein des Sohnes ein vorübergehendes, verschwindendes, kein wahres, wesentlich bleibendes, absolutes Moment. (*VPR* 3:203)

Here the term that motivates the entire discussion comes onstage: the community. The logic that governs Christian talk of the spirit is one in which the false opposition between community and Christ is overcome. Hegel gives a distinctly pietistic account of this. Or rather the logic he elaborates is the logic of a distinctly pietistic form of talk about the spirit. Humans' external frailties and tendencies to err are not overlooked by God in this form of talk, but rather God looks elsewhere: into the heart, upon the substantial. In language superficially reminiscent of Kant, it is the "inner will" that concerns God. Its function is, however, entirely counter to the logic that governs Kant's account of that will, which for Kant is beset by radical evil. In the talk whose logic Hegel investigates, the "inner will" is "essentially" a good will. This does not entail a denial of original sin: this is glossed by Hegel (or by the talk he investigates) as "the external" or the "inessential." According to this theology (which Hegel is merely reporting – there is no "Hegelian" theology in the frame), to be human is "essentially" to have a good "heart"; humanity's tendency to err is merely its "externality" (which, presumably, is what humans see of each other). In other words, humans are "essentially"

what God made them to be: good, even though “inessentially” they err. Human finitude is real, but it is “lowered” (Hegel does not specify how) to the “inessential.” Finally, Hegel identifies the logic of Christian talk of the spirit as one which is governed by “the idea” (*die Idee*). The idea is Hegel’s concentrated term for expressing a logic which overcomes false oppositions of various kinds. Here, the false opposition is between the “Son” and the “community.” To say that the otherness of the Son is transient rather than persistent is to say that a different kind of relation is in play, governed by a different logic, which does not sunder the one from the other, and pit them against each other.

That is the concept of the community in general, the idea, insofar as it is the process of the subject in and on itself, of the subject that, taken up in spirit, is of the spirit, so that the spirit of God dwells in it. This its pure self-consciousness is at the same time consciousness of truth; and pure self-consciousness, that knows and wills truth, just is the divine spirit in it. (*LPR* 3:332–333)

Das ist der Begriff der Gemeinde überhaupt, die Idee, die insofern der Prozeß des Subjekts in und an ihm selbst ist, des Subjekts, das in den Geist aufgenommen, geistig ist, so daß der Geist Gottes in ihm wohnt. Dies sein reines Selbstbewußtsein ist zugleich Bewußtsein der Wahrheit, und das reine Selbstbewußtsein, das die Wahrheit weiß und will, ist eben der göttliche Geist in ihm. (*VPR* 3:199)

The final logical term introduced here is “concept” (*Begriff*), which qualifies the “idea.” The function of “concept” is familiar from Hegel’s widespread use of this technical term across his whole corpus: it signals an atemporalized form of what appears narratively (or in his terms in “representational thinking”) as a process. The process is here that of the subject – in Hegel’s very condensed formulation, “the process of the subject in and on itself.” The “subject” previously described the logical function of speech about the Son of God, in Christian talk of the spirit. Hegel thus discerns a profoundly distinctive logic in such talk when he discerns in it a shape in which “the concept of the community” coalesces “as” the process of the subject, which is glossed in the characteristically Johannine language of the indwelling spirit. The spirit dwells *in ihm*, and the grammar of this clause almost certainly suggests that *ihm* refers to “the subject.” But by this stage in the logical exposition, as we discovered at the end of the section immediately prior, the otherness of the Son in relation to the community has been overcome. That means that “subject” is now governed by a logic in which it can refer very broadly indeed, and certainly in a way in which there is no false opposition between “the Son” and “the community.” The two remain distinct, but they

are now utterly in relation, according to the logic which governs Christian talk of the spirit. The agency of the Son now utterly infuses the agency of the community: this is what talk of the spirit means.

This, then, is the witness of the spirit. We have not quite finished with it, but before winding things up as best we can, some taking stock is in order.

This has been a long journey through three sets of lectures, even though only a tiny portion of those lectures has been discussed. A conclusion is called for. This need not be long or complex, despite the thoroughness of Hegel's analysis, because of the relative ease with which it can be interpreted, as long as one obeys certain interpretative rules. These rules can now be specified.

- (1) Hegel should wherever possible be taken to be commenting on Christian forms of speech, rather than producing his own forms of speech.
- (2) Where Hegel uses logical terms, he should wherever possible be taken to be offering logical analysis of that speech, rather than replacing that speech with his own.
- (3) Hegel should wherever possible be taken to be engaged in second-order philosophical discourse about theology, rather than first-order theological discourse.
- (4) The presence of logical terms should wherever possible be taken as a display of logical analysis, rather than as the intrusion of bizarre unorthodox theological neologisms.
- (5) Where the reader finds Hegel's meanings to be obscure or bizarre, the reader should ask whether his or her interpretation is guided by the very kinds of logic whose errors Hegel seeks to repair.
- (6) Where Hegel claims to find certain logics in Christian speech about the Trinity he should wherever possible be taken at face value.

This entire investigation into a small part of Hegel's *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* was motivated by anxieties displayed by Hegel's readers. These anxieties are perhaps best expressed as a worry that Hegel collapses the distinction between divine and human action – in my terms, his writings display the eclipse of grace.

It should now be clear that this anxiety is not (or rather should not be) produced by any particular theological claims made by Hegel, including the infamous “God existing as community” from the 1827 series. It is produced by the prior belief, that is not warranted by Hegel's texts, that Hegel is primarily making theological claims. In other words, Hegel is only in danger of collapsing distinctions (of whatever kind) if he is engaged in theology. I have attempted to prove – by detailed exposition of actual texts, rather than breezy assurances about Hegel's orthodoxy – that Hegel is not primarily engaged in theology, but in logical analysis of a theology he inherits and

which he takes seriously. This proof does not consist in a claim that Hegel is doing logical analysis, supported by textual warrants (e.g. claims by Hegel to be doing logical analysis, although these do exist too). The proof consists in interpreting Hegel's texts *as* logical analysis and showing that they make a whole lot more sense when read in this way, compared with what happens when Hegel is interpreted theologically.

The answer to the question, "does Hegel collapse the distinction between divine and human action?" is "the question arises from a misconception about the kind of discussion Hegel offers."

What about the question, "what are the warrants for belief, in Hegel's view, if they are not things like historical facts or miracles etc.?" The answer to this question is, in brief, that Hegel insists that the only warrant for belief is "the witness of the spirit." In response to the further question, "but what does this mean?", the only possible answer is a full and detailed interpretation of Hegel's claims about the logic that guides Christian talk of the spirit, which is what I have offered. If this interpretation remains unsatisfying, then one can attempt a non-Hegelian answer which is nonetheless in the spirit of his inquiries. The dialogue might go like this:

Q: What are the warrants for belief?

A: The witness of the spirit.

Q: What is the witness of the spirit?

A: A satisfactory grasp of the witness of the spirit requires speech governed by the same logic that governs Christian talk of the spirit.

Q: What is that logic?

A: It is a logic in which false oppositions are overcome.

Q: What false oppositions?

A: Oppositions between, e.g., "subject" and "object," "faith" and "knowledge," "divine action" and "human action," "Jesus Christ" and "the Church."

Q: What are the sources of these false oppositions?

A: They are generated by errant logics, e.g. those of Cartesian and Kantian philosophy.

Q: What makes them *false* oppositions, rather than just oppositions?

A: When their fruit is to obstruct the generativity of theology, they can be taken to be false.

Q: What kind of generativity?

A: Theological insistence on, e.g., the non-competitiveness of God and humanity, or on participation in the love, life, and truth of God, as this is understood in the tradition.

Q: How does all this function as warrants for belief?

A: It repairs the logics that govern certain ways of inquiring into warrants for belief.

Q: What?

A: For warrants to function as warrants, arguments must be guided by a logic. A logic errs not only when it generates false oppositions, but when it generates errant rules by which warrants can be assessed.

Q: WHAT?

A: Logics determine what can count as warrants in the first place. When the only things that can count as warrants for belief are things like “facts” or “history” or even “miracles,” this is a sign for Hegel that an errant logic is operative.

Q: Doesn't that condemn quite a large portion of the work done by philosophers of religion and biblical scholars have done since Kant?

A: Hegel's task is less one of condemnation and more one of repair.

Q: Is Hegel trying to repair theology, biblical scholarship, ecclesiastical history, etc.?

A: Not directly, no. He is trying to repair the logics that guide them.

Q: What logics do theologians, biblical scholars, and historians study?

A: What study?

Eclipse of Grace

Is there an eclipse of grace in the three Hegel texts interpreted here? It must seem to many readers that, like a slippery politician, I have dodged this question. Instead of offering a robust theological analysis of Hegel's handling of Christological and Trinitarian topics, and offering a thorough assessment of the relation between divine and human action displayed therein, this study has instead rather repetitively uttered pronouncements about Hegel's development of an alternative logic.

This is true. There are thus at least two kinds of criticism that can rightly be leveled at this approach. The first is that the wrong texts were selected. It might be that in "Absolute Knowing" and "The Absolute Idea" and in the discussion of "God as the existing community" there is little evidence of the eclipse of grace, but what about the *Jugendschriften* (the source for Hamacher's *Pleroma*), the *Encyclopaedia* (the source for Theunissen's *Hegels Lehre vom absoluten Geist*) or two other parts of the *Phenomenology*, namely the discussion of "Unhappy Consciousness" or the whole of the "Religion" chapter (sources for many commentators on Hegel)? The second is that the texts in question do exhibit the eclipse of grace and I have underplayed this for polemical purposes.

At one level I concede these criticisms. There are other texts which present a more problematic relation of divine and human action than the texts I have chosen, and these are discussed thoroughly by Brito and O'Regan among others. To echo O'Regan, there is a "heterodox Hegel" to be discerned in these texts. It is also true that in the texts I have chosen, especially those in the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, Hegel does not limit himself to what I have called "second-order" reflection, and seems to engage in some

first-order theological recommendations. It is manifestly the case that I have played this down for polemical purposes.

At a deeper level, however, these criticisms do not matter. This study has not presented a defense of Hegel's *theology* against criticisms of it. At no point has it considered Hegel's theological proposals and defended him against the charge of collapsing the distinction between divine and human action. Instead, it has in a disciplined way refused to consider those theological proposals and has drawn attention, instead, to his philosophical interpretations of Christian doctrines. My contribution is to advocate a strong distinction between theological proposals (first-order claims) and philosophical analysis (second-order claims). I do not think this distinction is made sufficiently strongly in much secondary literature on Hegel, and so I have made it emphatically. I readily concede that Hegel engages in both kinds of practice, and I am persuaded by O'Regan in particular that if one considers the theological proposals, where Hegel in fact makes them they are often deeply problematic. But I am struck, more forcefully, by the lack of interest in Hegel's alternative logic, which is developed out of an engagement with Christian doctrine, and which stands quite independently of his theological proposals. Hegel's logic is not developed out of a revised theology, but out of classic Christian doctrines which need no radical revision, even for Hegel. I do not mean that Hegel makes no revisions to classic Christian doctrines (Brito and O'Regan catalogue many such revisions) but that the doctrines need no revision in order for Hegel's logic to be developed.

I hope to have sown some doubt, however, even about the frequency and extent of Hegel's theological proposals, which was part of the point of my strong criticisms of Hodgson's edition of the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* in chapter 4. I have claimed that very often Hegel is taken to be making theological proposals when he is more plausibly understood as engaging in second-order philosophical analysis. In other words, if one fails to distinguish theological proposals from philosophical analysis, there is a strong tendency to consider everything as a set of theological proposals. I consider this badly wrong-headed and deeply damaging to an adequate interpretation of Hegel. This is not intended to rescue Hegel from his difficulties, but it does place some obstacles in the way of those who theologially demolish Hegel at a safe distance from the texts. A new task comes into view: one must discern when Hegel is making theological proposals, and when he is engaged in philosophical analysis. I have not discharged that task systematically or comprehensively: this study has merely made the case for making the distinction, and then shown some cases where this makes a difference to how one interprets Hegel. It is for others, who have a more comprehensive grasp of the whole of Hegel's corpus, to take up the larger task of reviewing all of Hegel's significant theological engagements. It is a challenge, as it will mean in essence rewriting Brito's study of Hegel's Christology and Schlitt's

study of Hegel's Trinitarianism, as well as re-evaluating O'Regan's claims about Hegel's heterodoxy or Desmond's assessment of Hegel's denial of transcendence.

In sum I make two claims that are intended to force a reconsideration of nearly everything that has so far been written about Hegel's religious thought. First, Hegel is engaged in two tasks where commonly he is taken to be engaged in one. Those tasks are (a) developing a participatory logic out of an investigation of Christian doctrines and (b) making theological proposals. Second, the logical task is by far the more prevalent and important one, and in many of the cases where readers discern theological proposals Hegel is discernibly (on my reading) engaged in developing an alternative logic. This case has been made through commentary on texts, rather than through detailed sparring with other commentators, partly in order to encourage the next generation of theologians to read and take Hegel seriously, and partly because I think my proposals cause certain sets of arguments, such as those between Brito, Desmond, Hodgson, O'Regan, and Shanks, or those between Devos, Houlgate, Lumsden, and Flay, to be recast in various ways. I do not enter these frays on their own terms, but introduce new terms that might produce more fruitful forms of disagreement with and about Hegel. Hegel's complaint, throughout the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, is that Christian doctrines are being neglected, *and that this is debilitating for philosophy*. I am not sure that is a message that most philosophers, including those who look to Hegel as a contemporary resource, are willing to hear. It is a rather interesting question to ask how "religious" Hegel's thinking is, if his primary contribution is the development of an alternative non-oppositional logic on the basis of an engagement with Christian doctrines, and through a Johannine language of truth, life, and love. It is philosophy more than it is theology, yet it is utterly inextricable from theology.

This is one area where there is much work yet to be done on a philosopher that one might think had been done to death. I hope to have inspired a new generation of systematic theologians to engage with Hegel as proper preparation for engaging with the twentieth-century theological classics, but also to have stimulated the next generation of scholars of Hegel's philosophy of religion to distinguish between theological and logical innovation, and to revisit debates about Hegel in the light of such a distinction. Any serious theological engagement with Hegel will need at a bare minimum to take account of the work of Theunissen, Brito, O'Regan, Vetö, Houlgate, Dews, Wendte, and Shanks.

I have attempted to show what difference it makes if one concentrates on logic rather than ontology in Hegel. In different terms, it is not Hegel's system of classification that should stimulate most interest from theologians but his investigations into how terms within any system of classification might be related. I have underplayed the significance of Hegel's system of

classification. Those who view the reasons for this charitably but nonetheless wish to know more about Hegel's system of classification and its relation to theology should consult O'Regan's *Heterodox Hegel*: it is well established as a classic on this topic. Instead, I have concentrated on identifying two principal ways in which Hegel considers such relations. The first is a relation of false opposition, where terms are separated from each other and then treated as contradictory. The second is a relation of distinction-in-inseparable-relation, where the difference between terms is fully acknowledged, but they are not treated independently. These can be summarized as two ways of taking such terms: as oppositions or as pairs. There are two further ways that do not attract Hegel's interest so much. One is a relation of (innocuous) opposition and the other is a relation of identity. Had Hegel said more about relations of (innocuous) opposition he would have done better justice to certain practices of Christian worship, a matter to which we will turn shortly. Had he said more about relations of identity there might be fewer readers who confuse his account of pairs with an account of identity, especially as the plain sense of some of his claims, taken out of context, seems to be that $x = y$ rather than that x and y are a pair. But as Betty Heimann said so wisely nearly a hundred years ago: to cite Hegel is to misunderstand and to misuse him.¹ To quote Hegel is to misquote him.

There are at least two other areas where there is fruitful work to be done. There is the Hegel-Schleiermacher question. Hegel's *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* and Schleiermacher's *The Christian Faith* offer different assessments of Christian doctrine. It is possible that Schleiermacher offers radical theological proposals whereas Hegel offers radical logical proposals. Their disagreements may turn less on who has the better theological proposals and more on who offers the more fruitful model of the relation between philosophy and theology.² There is also the Hegel-Jacobi question. Hegel shows himself throughout the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* to be deeply suspicious of the tradition of negative theology, to the point of rejecting it. It is easy to see why: he is concerned with and alarmed by a tendency in modern thought to deny knowledge of God. In his view the tradition of negative theology too easily plays into the hands of those post-Kantians who say God is unknowable. Jacobi's way of splitting faith and reason, which Hegel views as a negative-theological strategy, causes untold damage, in Hegel's view, to the project of investigating the knowledge of

¹ Betty Heimann, *System und methode in Hegels Philosophie* (Leipzig: Meiner, 1927), p. xxi.

² A descriptive account of some of the main issues can be found in Philip Merklinger, *Philosophy, Theology and Hegel's Berlin Philosophy of Religion 1821–1827* (New York: SUNY, 1993), but this does not give an adequate account of the philosophical significance of Schleiermacher's use of "feeling" (*Gefühl*) of the kind that one sees in the work of Andrew Bowie.

God in a philosophically sophisticated way. But in the wake of such studies as Denys Turner's *The Darkness of God* (1995) and Mark McIntosh's *Mystical Theology* (1998) it is by no means obvious that negative theology is philosophically corrosive in the way Hegel says it is. There is thus room for further work on the difference between Hegel's and Schleiermacher's proposals for theology, and on Hegel's critique of negative theology.

We can return to the question of the eclipse of grace. I discern contrary tendencies in Hegel's thinking. The first is towards making a distinction between narrative and logic (between *Vorstellung* and *Begriff*) in which the relation is one of complementarity (as seen in VPR 3:183–184); the second is towards displacing religion by philosophy, in which a “new shape” of spirit becomes visible (as sketched in §808 of the *Phenomenology*). Neither tendency is dominant or often repeated in his work, although it may be significant that the first tendency is found in later and the second tendency in earlier work.

In the more complementary relation, there are two kinds of thinking in which the philosophically minded religious person might engage. The first is to picture God as an object, and to engage with God in various ways on the basis of such picturing. The second is to “de-tense” one's conception of God, and to rethink one's practices in terms where the false opposition between thinking and being is overcome. It seems clear to me that the Christian tradition does both things, and has done for some time. Hegel himself says that Anselm's ontological argument displays a logic in which the Cartesian false opposition between thinking and being is absent.

These two practices can be discerned in scripture itself. In Psalms there is a rich and dramatic enactment of address to God as an object. God does not directly speak or act in Psalms, but God is addressed as one who does speak and act. Psalms displays what Hegel calls *Vorstellung* or representation, and its mode of utterance is address, relation, petition, praise, lament, gratitude. *Vorstellung*, the practice of picturing God, is overwhelmingly second-person in the liturgical traditions. In John's Gospel there is a display of *Begriff* or “de-tensed” thinking. The Word was “in the beginning with God” (John 1:2). Moreover God is not so much an object as “in” us, in such a way that human action and divine action are bound up with each other: “And I will pray the Father, and he will give you another Counsellor, to be with you for ever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him; you know him, for he dwells with you, and will be in you” (John 14:16–17, RSV). Knowledge of God is a matter of God dwelling in humanity rather than being what Hegel would call an object of consciousness.

This double aspect of relation to God – as object in Psalms and as de-tensed indwelling in John's Gospel – is performed liturgically as well as articulated scripturally. In the Mass, in the first part, God is addressed as

object: in prayers of penitence, in psalms, in the prayers of the people. In the Eucharist, the participation of the people in God's life is performed as Christ's body and blood are received "in" each member of the congregation.

These two ways of taking God – as object and as participation – stimulate two different logical forms. Psalms (and perhaps certain forms of prayer) invite quite properly a logic of opposition between subject and object. God is addressed as one who is over and against the one who addresses. There is no scandal or embarrassment about such a practice or the oppositional logic that governs it. It is a respectable and well-established dimension of the long tradition. John's Gospel invites a logic of distinction-in-inseparable-relation, or more simply a logic of participation. God is "in" us and we participate in the body of Christ. The distinction between God and humanity is not abolished, but the relation is no longer one of opposition. This too is a well-established dimension of the tradition. It is thus clear that at least two logics are required in order to do justice to these two dimensions of Christian worship. The problem, which Hegel identifies early and often, is that modern philosophy is governed overwhelmingly by just one logic – that of false opposition. It is for this reason that Hegel's philosophy is generative for contemporary theology: it enables a more subtle appreciation of the different ways of taking God in scripture and in worship.

Hegel's response to a logic of false opposition is the development of two complementary logics: a logic of opposition (*Vorstellung*) and a logic of participation (*Begriff*), in such a way that both are quite properly operative. In "religion" one sees a logic of representation, or of opposition. In "absolute knowing" one sees a logic of the concept, or of participation. Just as one does not choose between Psalms and John's Gospel, or between prayers and Eucharist, so there is no final choice to be made between these two logical forms. It will nonetheless be the case that a logic of opposition will be unable to do justice to the deep sense of John's Gospel, and that a logic of participation will be unable to do justice to the plain sense of Psalms. It will also be overwhelmingly the case that a logic of false opposition, as found in Descartes, will be unable to do justice to either. It will be quickly noticed by the perceptive reader that whereas Hegel offers an opposition between *Vorstellung* and *Begriff*, I am suggesting that there is a distinction-in-inseparable-relation between them. This is not a matter of exegesis of texts but of bringing Hegel's own logic to bear on his own system of classification. The same might be done for the opposition Hegel sets up between "religion" and "absolute knowing," although I am inclined (for partisan Christian reasons) to see the relation between *Vorstellung* and *Begriff* within religion, rather than in the difference between religion and "science," in Hegel's sense. Hegel might not agree with that, but such a way of thinking is not wholly at odds with the thrust of his thinking. I offer it as a possible repair of Hegel's own repairs of the philosophical tradition, using Hegel's own tools.

Key to a proper understanding of Hegel is thus not just a distinction between a logic of false opposition and a logic of participation, but between a logic of false opposition and a logic of (innocuous) opposition. The latter has not been a feature of this study, by and large, because the more important task is to grasp the Chalcedonian participative logic of distinctness-in-inseparable-relation. Once this has been appreciated, however, it becomes possible to make the finer distinctions such as that between opposition and false opposition. A logic of opposition might be one in which oppositions are fitting, whereas a logic of false opposition is one in which the thinking in question calls for a logic of participation. The crucial feature of Hegel's philosophy is that a logic of distinctness-in-inseparable-relation remains perpetually available.

In closing we can notice how striking it is that in Christian worship the (fitting) logic of opposition, in which God is an object, is characterized by an overwhelmingly second-person relation (God is addressed as "You" more than God is thought as "Him"), whereas the logic of participation (in which God is thought of as the one in whom all creation has its being) is a form of thinking to which second-person and third-person relations do not do justice: God is neither "You" nor "Him," because second- and third-person relations mostly operate according to a logic of opposition or of false opposition. One of the reasons for thinking that a logic of participation should not simply displace a logic of opposition is that there is no reason to displace second-person speech to God. If anyone wishes to displace third-person speech about God, that may be a heroic endeavor, although one that surely is doomed to failure. The book of Job can be read as a contest between Job's second-person laments to God and the friends' third-person pronouncements about God, and it is a contest in which Job is pronounced righteous. It is nonetheless a minority voice in the tradition and may well continue to be. Hegel too wages a battle against third-person speech about God, although in his account the second-person address tends to be overwhelmed by the logic of participation. It is for this reason that one should probably not be a Hegelian even if one is prepared, as this study is, to learn philosophy from Hegel.

It is not just philosophy that theologians might learn from Hegel, however. Running through this study is a deep conviction that the tools Hegel develops have the potential to change and resource how scripture is interpreted, above all the Gospel of John. To discern in that Gospel the seeds of a logic of distinction-in-inseparable-relation, and to develop such a logic in order the better to interpret the Gospel that makes such thinking possible, seems to me a worthwhile endeavor. Hegel's critique of representation, of *Vorstellung*, was indeed once taken up as a tool for interpreting the Gospels. David Friedrich Strauss, in *The Life of Jesus Critically Examined*, advocated a critique of what he called "mythos," and it reappears in Bultmann's project

of demythologization nearly a century later, and then in J.A.T. Robinson's *Honest to God*. If I am persuasive in arguing that the logic of the concept, of *Begriff*, is best viewed not as a theological alternative, but as a specialized philosophical tool for addressing certain kinds of false opposition, then Strauss' proposals are wrong-headed.³ Strauss was right that Hegel's philosophy might have an impact on how we read scripture, but he failed to locate that impact where it would be most generative. Scripture might be the source of an alternative logic in which false oppositions are overcome, including the false oppositions which blight modern philosophy after Descartes. It is possible that Hegel's most enduring gift to theology is a set of philosophical practices that make explicit the ways in which the interpretation of scripture heals philosophy.

Discomforted by what appear to be the text's burdens, the attentive reader is stimulated into a process of corrective rereading . . . [yet] as the process of rereading continues, the very text that gave rise to the discomfort also gives rise to an unexpected sense that, while as yet inapparent, a solution is already available . . .⁴

³ See Nicholas Adams, "The Bible," in Nicholas Adams, George Pattison, and Graham Ward (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Theology and Modern European Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), and Nicholas Adams, "The Impact of Idealism on Religion," in id. (ed.), *The Impact of Idealism*, vol. 4: *Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming).

⁴ Peter Ochs, *Peirce, Pragmatism and the Logic of Scripture* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 319.

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Abbreviations

- LPR *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, vol. 3: *The Consummate Religion* (ed. P. Hodgson, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985).
- PbG *Phänomenologie des Geistes* (ed. Hans-Friedrich Wessels and Heinrich Clairmont, Hamburg: Meiner, 1987)
- VPR *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Religion: Die vollendete Religion* (ed. W. Jaeschke, Hamburg: Meiner, 1995)
- WdL *Wissenschaft der Logik: Die Lehre vom Begriff* (1816) (ed. Hans-Jürgen Gawoll, Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1994)

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